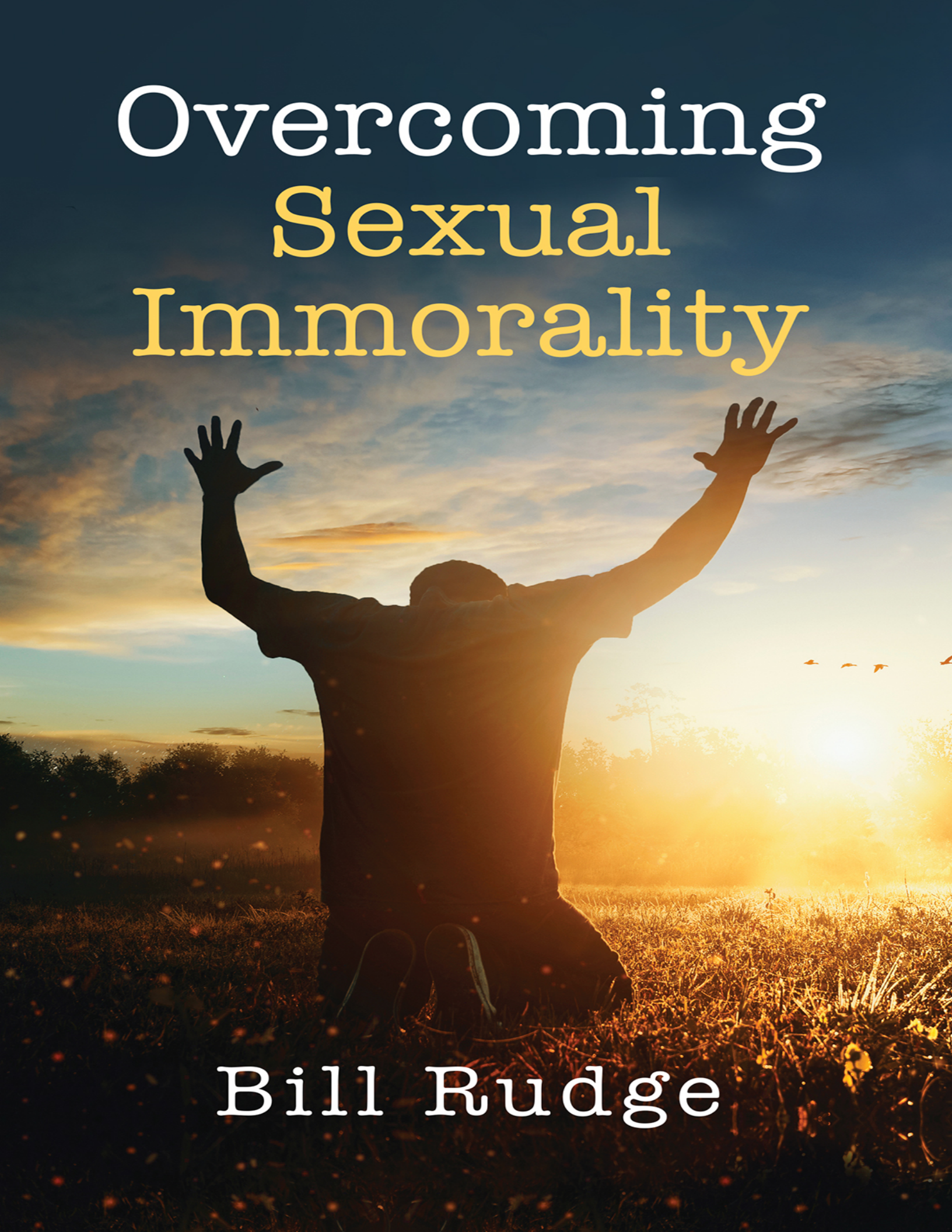
Overcoming Sexual Immorality



Bill Rudge

Overcoming Sexual Immorality

Bill Rudge

Hermitage, Pennsylvania

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 1985 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are from the New King James Version of the Bible, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Because of the sensitivity of this material, the names of people have been changed to protect them.

Overcoming Sexual Immorality
Copyright © 1992, 1996, 2008 by Bill Rudge
Updated and expanded edition copyright © 2023 by Bill Rudge

ISBN 978-1-889809-13-7

Published by Living Truth Publishers
A Division of Bill Rudge Ministries, Inc.
Hermitage, Pennsylvania
www.billrudge.org

Cover Design: Alpha Advertising
Typesetting: Pine Hill Graphics

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

1. Path to a Victorious Life
2. Rampant Immorality
3. The Infiltrated Church
4. Modesty and Purity
5. “But We’re in Love”
6. Sexual Fantasy World Is Far from Reality
7. The Bondage of Pornography
8. Not in My Home
9. The Media Connection
10. A Word to Victims
11. Even Heroes Suffer Consequences
12. God’s Perspective
13. Steps to Overcoming Sexual Immorality
14. A Storybook Romance
15. A Modern Day Love Story
16. Closing Comments
For More Information

1

Path to a Victorious Life

Overcoming sexual immorality is like engaging in a lethal street fight: It takes courage and fortitude to stand up to such a formidable foe. The struggle is an all-out battle, a warfare so to speak, for your very life—your body, mind, heart, soul, and family.

The illustrations and biblical truths contained within this book are intended to be like strikes and kicks in a brawl. Some will hit you squarely and hard while others may glance off. In a real fight you may need to use multiple strikes and hit vulnerable parts of the body to defeat a hostile opponent. Similarly, the principles in the following chapters are intended to hit every vital area possible, sometimes repetitively. Results will prove the decisive victory over your adversary.

This book offers a path to victory for those who desire to be set free from sexually immoral behavior. It took half my lifetime to learn the insights revealed within these pages, so you may want to review them occasionally as you put these biblical principles into practice.

May the Lord open your eyes to see the lies that have deceived so many. My prayer is that you open your heart to receive what far surpasses any physical pleasure. May your life be transformed to live victoriously—the victor in a great contest.

A life of purity, peace, and power will be worth every effort to obtain it.

2

Rampant Immorality

Sandi was a beautiful young woman—athletic, intelligent, and involved in many college activities. It seemed as though everything was going her way. However, the day I talked with her, she was broken and frightened. She fought back tears as she tried to explain how she had gotten into this situation. Drifting from her relationship with God, Sandi became promiscuous and self-indulgent, with no thought for the future. Now she was pregnant and to make matters worse, was uncertain of the identity of the baby's father.

Jacob thought he had it all together, until his wife fell in love with another man in their swingers' group. A nightmarish scenario followed: the double homicide of his wife and her lover, prison for him, deep trauma for his children and family, and the untimely death of his mother.

Daniel was a good-looking, middle-aged married man with wandering eyes. His many sexual relationships with attractive young women marred his outspoken testimony for Christ. His wife suffered silently through years of his unfaithfulness until she finally divorced him.

Barb was a teen living with her mom and stepfather. Her stepfather sexually molested her. Unable to cope with being raped by her stepfather, she took an overdose of drugs, lapsed into a coma, and died a few days later.

Rob invited his recently divorced, best friend to move in with them as he had no place to live. A few months later Rob came home early from work to discover his wife and best friend in bed. Rob's wife divorced him and married the other guy. Rob was forced to move out of his house while his former best friend moved in to live with Rob's ex-wife and children.

Kirk was a youth pastor. He seemed a positive influence in the lives of many young people—until he molested two boys. After being turned in to the local authorities, he fled the country; but the boys were left to deal with the emotional trauma.

David volunteered for a local youth organization. He appeared to be an excellent role model; however, David was shot to death by an angry father who accused him of molesting his son. It was soon discovered that he had molested many other children.

Ruth was having sex with various men in the back seat of her car on the street in front of her house. She thought the shield of late night darkness concealed her adultery, but everyone in the neighborhood knew—even her husband and children. She also did not realize that her 12-year-old daughter was following her example: During the summer she often slept out on the front porch. Late at night, teenage boys would sneak over the banister one at a time to have sex with her.

Paul was addicted to pornography. He concealed it from his wife for several years. When she did discover it, she divorced him. They both found out later that their son—years earlier—had discovered his father's pornographic materials. As a preteen he was also addicted to pornography and had used his younger sister to experiment with some of the visuals he saw.

Bobby was a teenager who had consensual sex with a female classmate: A month later he was told that she was pregnant. Terror overtook his life, like an unexpected strike of lightning and prompted him to strategize how to kill the baby or the mother if she refused to cooperate and have an abortion. He was consumed by fear for the future. A few months later, he found out it was all a hoax, intended to punish him for dumping the girl after their brief sexual encounter.

Christy was at a party with a group of friends. Someone put something in her drink and she woke up the next morning, alone in a back bedroom, knowing she had been violated. Two months later she was diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease.

Eilene was a high school student when she molested the three young boys she was babysitting. One of the victims, now an older man, told me that the shame and confusion lingered for years,

thrusting him into a life of immorality and drugs, until Christ set him free. Eilene married but continued her deviant behavior by being unfaithful to her husband. He murdered her.

Lenny was married and a popular pastor of a growing church. A sexual relationship with another woman led to serious marriage problems. Unwilling to accept counseling to save the marriage, he divorced his wife. He left a devastated family and congregation. A few years later, after several more affairs, he committed suicide.

Jess and his wife were involved in ministry. He started drinking at a bar where he supposedly witnessed to the patrons. His wife eventually—but reluctantly—accompanied him to the bar. While he was busy flirting with other women, he did not realize that another guy was making a play for his wife. Jess' wife soon left him for the other man. With tears streaming down his face he told of the traumatic scenario that unfolded. He begged God to restore his marriage and pleaded with his wife to come back—she never did.

Beth was single and in her early twenties when she got involved with a married man. His wife found out and confronted her, so she ended the relationship with her lover. However, Nathan was not about to lose Beth so when she refused to continue seeing him, he shot and killed her.

Sonya began having sex as a young teen. She was taking birth control pills but still ended up pregnant a few years later. Her boyfriend wanted to marry her, but she refused. After having the baby, she broke up with him and soon became pregnant by another guy. Sonya and that man lived together in extreme poverty with two young children. She wanted to leave the father of her second child because he treated her badly, but she had nowhere to go.

Danny and *Ann* were married and had two children. Ann met another man and ran away with him to another state. Danny did not see her or his children for several years. Ann eventually married the other man. A few years later Ann was devastated when her second husband left her for another woman.

Linda was happily married until she discovered she had herpes. She was confused because she had been a faithful wife. She soon

discovered her husband contracted herpes while having an affair. Years of anger, guilt, and pain followed.

Shawn was a courageous Marine who conquered his enemies and fulfilled his commitment to the Marine Corps. Yet he could not fulfill his commitment to his wife or conquer his lustful passions. The Lord gave me a clear message for him, "Kill your lusts, or your lusts will kill you." The reality of those words soon surfaced as his continued sexual addiction ravaged his beautiful wife, their children and brought great anguish into his life.

Mark was a vivid example of what someone can become if they do not repent of their immorality. Mark looked like a living-dead person—ashen skin, unkempt hair, wild eyes, and slow speech and body movements. For over an hour Mark told his tale of misery, which he believes began at age 11 when he found his father's pornographic materials. That led to over 30 years of unimaginably deviant sexual addiction. With quivering lips Mark said, "My sexual addiction has destroyed me." Thirty years of doctors, psychiatrists, medications, hospitalization, and untold pain and grief to himself and his family left him a shell of a man. As tears streamed down Mark's face, he asked the Lord to forgive him: He destroyed every vestige of pornography on his computer and in his home. It has been a long and difficult road, but with God's help, Mark is winning the battle.

Andrew was married only a short time when he began having an affair. When his wife discovered it she left—emotionally traumatized and forced to endure the struggles of a single mother. Shortly thereafter, on his way to visit his lover, Andrew was in a car accident. Confined to a wheelchair, he is attempting reconciliation with his ex-wife and their young child. At this time that possibility is uncertain.

The High Price

These are only a few examples of so many more that I could share concerning the adverse consequences of sexual promiscuity. The previous scenarios have been played out countless times, in every generation, all over the world.

Maybe a tragic accident or dread disease brings an unfaithful mate to their senses concerning the importance of a committed

marriage. Perhaps an unfaithful partner wakes up one day and realizes that they really do love their former spouse—now no longer interested in restoration or remarriage. Some figure out too late that they lost the best thing they ever had. Sad irony is the price the unfaithful partner often pays in later years—as in Andrew's case, sometimes much sooner.

There are countless unfaithful partners, who because of injury, illness, or advancing age, are in desperate need of a caregiver. Yet, the one who could have lovingly taken care of them is gone—themselves ill or coping with disease or prematurely deceased—often by the very hand of the unfaithful partner who unleashed destruction on them earlier in their marriage. Some unfaithful spouses who were able to salvage their marriages, later in life felt intense grief and remorse for the health and youth stolen from their partner because of their unfaithfulness.

The high price of sexual immorality and unfaithfulness is sobering. Time and choices have a way of catching up, as we eventually do reap what we sow. One day the loss of what could have been and should have been will be overwhelming and devastating. Minimize the regrets of tomorrow with wise choices today.

New Levels of Depravity

Our decadent society is free-falling into an abyss of unrestrained and uninhibited sexual addiction. All limits have been removed as virtually anything and everything is acceptable. Today's generation has adopted the attitude of the Israelites in the days of the Judges, when "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). Lusts of the flesh, pornographic obsession, provocative behaviors and illicit relationships lead to out-of-control behavior, addictive lifestyles, and physical, emotional, and spiritual enslavement.

In spite of the threat of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, ruined lives, broken families, and a host of other adverse consequences, sexual immorality is rampant. Pornography, prostitution, strip clubs, premarital sex, adultery, spouse swapping, orgies, exhibitionism, indecent exposure, molestation, sexual abuse, rape, sex trafficking, sadomasochism, bestiality, necrophilia,

pedophilia, and other lewd practices permeate our culture. In various ways people today take the behavior of ancient pagan fertility rites to new levels of depravity. We live in a world given over to every sexual perversion imaginable as people, driven by an insatiable appetite for erotica, unsuccessfully attempt to satisfy their unquenchable lust for sexual gratification. The Bible says:

> Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more (Ephesians 4:19).

In our world today of sexual confusion many identify themselves as transgender, non-binary, bisexual, polysexual, pansexual, asexual and so on.

Spiraling into Darkness

Dr. Michael Brown wrote in the May 2019 edition of *Decision* magazine:

> I'm talking about when a nation collapses—morally and spiritually. When a culture spirals out of control. When restraint is all but gone. When good becomes evil and evil becomes good. When shameful things are celebrated and holy things are denigrated. This is what we are witnessing in America today. Our country is spiraling out of control. Our culture is unraveling. Darkness is being heralded as light.
>
> We are reaping the fruit of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, which began with an explosion of promiscuity, and then led to the loss of the sacredness of marriage, then no-fault divorce, then the epidemic rise of pornography, then the redefining of marriage, then the redefining of gender. What's next?

Woe to Those Who Call Evil Good

Virtually everything we once knew to be wrong is now considered right, and what was once believed to be bad is now deemed good. Our culture has strayed so far from God's Word that people are blind to the lies that are deceiving so many. The prophet Isaiah accurately

commented about such a reversal of morality: "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20).

In contrast to the corruption today, God admonishes that sexually immoral behavior and speech (obscene stories, foolish talk, vulgar jokes...) should have no place among His people (Ephesians 5:3-4).

Be Aware: The Four Stages of Decline

There are four stages through which those living an aberrant lifestyle could mislead people:

1. Tolerance and Acceptance: Initially, they say they just want us to tolerate and accept their lifestyles.

2. Endorsement: After tolerance and acceptance, they push us to endorse their lifestyles—which most have done.

3. Celebration: After endorsement, they push hard for us to celebrate their aberrant lifestyles. Many are doing so.

4. Punishment: Finally, they want to punish (removal from social media, lawsuits, loss of income, incarceration...) anyone who does not accept, endorse and celebrate their corrupt lifestyles.

Flee Fornication!

The remainder of this chapter was excerpted from Rick Renner's book, *Sparkling Gems from the Greek, Volume II,* February 4. Used by permission.

Paul urged the Corinthian believers to "flee fornication…" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

"Fleeing fornication" would have been very hard to do in a city like Corinth! Corinth was known for its perversion and twisted sinful activities, as well as for its drunkenness. In short, it had a worldwide reputation for being a "party city" and a center for "sexual freedom," where one could avail himself to the vilest of human instincts without any fear of others' disapproval. The entire city was devoted to the sex industry; therefore, any kind of sex was considered acceptable and fair. Some have speculated that after Sodom and Gomorrah, Corinth may have been one of the most perverted cities in human history.

The city had a constant flow of sailors who came to town to party, and this fed the prostitution business—the largest source of revenue in the city of Corinth. Furthermore, the city abounded with idolatry, which frequently incorporated sexually immoral behavior into their rituals.

In addition to all these excesses, wine was integrally tied into nearly every aspect of the city's culture. It was used in idol worship as a sacrament and a tool to commune with the spirit realm; it was commonly imbibed by prostitutes and their customers; and it was readily available in the city's bathhouses to loosen people's inhibitions so they would more readily participate in homosexual activities. Basically, all these factors combined meant the alcohol business in Corinth was booming! So not only was Corinth rife with idolatry and all manner of gross sexual perversion, but the city also struggled with serious alcohol abuse and addiction.

In fact, the city of Corinth became so synonymous with perversion and drunkenness that the term "to Corinthianize," first coined by the Greek author Aristophanes (450-385 BC), became a common term used in other cities of the Roman Empire to describe *drunken or immoral debauchery*. Regardless of where you lived, if you knew a person who was given to excess and drunkenness, that person was referred to as "a Corinthianizer." Corinth's reputation was so stained that if an actor in any city of the Roman Empire was required to play the role of a drunkard on stage, he was always depicted as a drunk Corinthian.

This was the environment the Corinthian believers faced every day, and because they were so new in their faith, the lure of the world and the flesh still had a strong hold on them. Paul knew they needed to use their minds to think carefully about where they went and what situations they should avoid. Even today, we know it's just common sense that if a person struggles with alcohol, he needs to stay out of bars! Likewise, Paul knew that these Corinthian believers needed to avoid environments where they might be tempted to fall back into sin. *Fleeing from sinful environments was the smartest thing they could do if they really wanted to stay free from sin!*

This meant the newly saved Corinthian believers had to avoid *a lot* of places in Corinth! It meant they had to reassess how to maneuver in the city in order to avoid all the places where sin tried to call out to them. Because there were so many sinful places in Corinth, it took concentration and serious planning for them to obey Paul's exhortation to "flee fornication." However, because Paul admonished them to stay away from these cesspools of sin and perversion, the committed believers in Corinth learned to move as quickly as possible to "flee" from these establishments.

The word "flee" that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 6:18 is the Greek word *pheugo*, which means *to run, to flee,* or even *to take flight*. Making this word even stronger is the fact that the tense used in this verse conveys the idea of a *habitual fleeing* or a *continuous escaping*. This plainly means Paul is telling believers that they need to make a habit of *running* from sin! In short, the word *pheugo* means to run like crazy!

Sometimes the smartest thing you can do is *get up* and *get out* of a situation as fast as you can. Just as Joseph fled with haste to escape the seductive advances from Potiphar's wife (see Genesis 39:11-12), if you're in a setting where you're being tempted or you feel yourself being lured to do something contrary to the Word of God—*get out of there*! Rather than stick around to prove you can resist, it's time for you to get your feet moving and resist sin by saying *goodbye* as you walk out and let the door slam behind you! A weak person won't have the strength to say no and walk away—but a person who is strong will say, *"Enough is enough!"* and walk away.

Paul's order to the Corinthian congregation was to "flee fornication." In order for them to obey Paul's command, these believers had to make drastic changes in their routines. They had to change the places they frequented, the activities they participated in, and the people who surrounded them. If they were going to walk away from sin and stay free from it, they would have to deliberately avoid the situations that previously made it so easy for them to fall into sin.

How does Paul's message apply to you?

For you to stay free, it may be necessary for you to choose new friends. You may need to make a break from the places where you used to spend your free time. You may need to quit watching the TV programs or movies that once were a big part of your life. It is possible that you may need to stop reading the material you once read. It may even mean that you need to discontinue your internet service so you won't gravitate to pornographic sites that keep luring you into their seductive, entangling web.

Is it possible that you've been praying for strength to resist sin, when actually all you simply need to do is to stay away from the things that encourage you to sin? If you're tempted to overeat, stay out of the kitchen! If you're lured to pornographic websites, then add filters to block those sites, or, if necessary, discontinue your internet service. Permanently fix your situation by removing yourself from the things and the places that have a negative influence on you. *Taking this common sense approach may be the answer to the prayers you've been praying to be free!*

If you are serious about your walk with God, you need to make every change necessary to stay both spiritually strong and free from guilt and condemnation. I admonish you to take Paul's words deep into your heart and "flee" from those things that have an adverse effect on your soul and on your spiritual life.

My Prayer for You Today

Lord, I thank You for speaking to my heart today about making a break with my past and with the places that tend to pull me down. I admit that I've allowed my flesh to lead me, and I have been wrong for not making better choices for my life. I've tried to blame the devil and others for my failure, but today I am taking personal responsibility for the control and direction of my life—and I am walking away from those places, people, and deeds that negatively affect me. Holy Spirit, I tap into Your mighty power already at work within me to strengthen me with might in my inward man as I make these right choices. With Your help and by Your grace, I can and I will walk free and STAY free! I pray this in Jesus' name!

3

The Infiltrated Church

Though sexual immorality in the world today is alarming, even more startling is how it has infiltrated so many churches. Many professing Christians, and even pastors, carelessly pursue practices and lifestyles that are destructive to their health and testimony, disastrous to their families, and devastating to their congregations. God's enemy is intent on involving Christians in pornography and illicit sexual relationships. His goal? To neutralize believers and render them powerless.

We received the following letter from an incarcerated minister:

> I am 31 years of age and currently incarcerated in Arkansas. I was sentenced to nine years in prison for second degree Sexual Assault. I am taking advantage of this time to correct my problematic thinking and behavior patterns. For years, I have struggled with sexual immorality, and as a young minister, I had every opportunity to rely on the Word of God as a guide for deliverance, strength, and healing. My failure to believe that as a "Warrior" I could conquer the war that raged in the battlefield of my mind, weakened my spirit and ultimately led to a crime and a nine year prison sentence. I make no excuses for my actions and take full responsibility for the hurt and harm that I have caused my victim and her family—as well as my family and those who were/are connected to me.
>
> I have been blessed to write a book entitled *Chronicles of a Warrior: A journey to Complete Freedom* that not only tells of my struggle with sexual immortality and the spirit of heaviness, but also the internal freedom I am experiencing

> in Christ. Your book, *Overcoming Sexual Immorality*, has been a blessing to me. Thank you, Bill, for hearing and obeying the voice of God. I was halfway in the completion of my book when my wife mailed your book to me. There are good nuggets in *Overcoming Sexual Immorality* that I would love to use in my book *Chronicles of a Warrior*. I have found the things you said to be true and effective and would love the privilege and opportunity to share quotes from your book. Because of your obedience and willingness to write this book, I have been able to use more effective tools in my journey to complete freedom. May God continue to use you and bless you for your obedience. *A. P.*

Through the pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification Satan relentlessly attempts to lure believers from pure devotion to Christ. He knows that a compromised person is an ineffective tool for the Lord. While Satan's primary instrument is the use of sexual enticements, he knows all our vulnerabilities and past weaknesses and will use any vice to seduce us.

Christian homes, churches, and ministries are being devastated by both members and leaders who are involved in pornography, fornication, and adultery. Many are tempted and seduced into a short season of pleasure; then seemingly without warning, they are caught in the most oppressive and devastating consequences. Without God's intervention, it is impossible to escape the web of destruction which the enemy weaves. One fallen man of God said to me, "You cannot imagine the evil and oppression Satan unleashed in my life, nor the joy and peace of the Lord he stole from me."

Is it any wonder Paul wrote in Colossians 3:5-8:

> Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things….

Abstain from Sinful Desires

A female inmate wrote a letter to us, giving a glimpse of the consequences of sexual immorality. Excerpts follow:

> I received your book *Overcoming Sexual Immorality.* Thank you for writing it. Most people do not realize how addictive sexual immorality really is. Also, once being in ministry myself it seems to be the very first sin the devil places on a platter of other pleasures for us to taste and enjoy.
>
> I turned my back on the Lord because of several things, but mostly because our pastor lived a double life. We found out he had been participating, along with a few other leaders, in orgies. He eventually ran off with a younger girl in the church. Before the pastor left, he made a pass at me, which hurt. After a year, I began to stray.
>
> Drinking and sex were the lures. I was burned out from working hard in ministry for eleven years, hurt, disillusioned and very confused. I realize these are not acceptable but they were very real to me then. I ran from God for ten years. In that time, alcoholism and sexual immorality were my life.
>
> My children were in their teens when I divorced my ministry partner, friend, and the father of my children. The first two years I drank constantly, had four nervous breakdowns, and many sexual partners. My sins continued until I came home as a prodigal and my Heavenly Father was there waiting for me. Thank God for a second chance.
>
> Because of my sin, I destroyed my family. I am serving a two to ten year sentence. I have served one year. Sexual immorality and drinking, with my full consent, destroyed my life. Now I am a Sex Offender.
>
> The Lord has fully restored my two children and me. In this past year, the Lord has allowed me to sit in this regional jail waiting to be transported to prison. It has just been Jesus

and me and all the Bible studies I can get. I am being remolded and polished to be of use to Him again. He has promised to fully restore my life and more. It took being charged and prison-bound to stop me.

The apostle Peter tells us the following:

> As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 1:14-15; 2:11; 4:3-5).

The White Stone

Dr. BJ Rudge wrote the following for a ministry newsletter:

> The apostle Paul sets an example for believers in Jesus Christ to stand firm with conviction concerning what the Bible has to say on sexuality. Yet, countless Christians are clueless concerning what it means to live a holy and righteous life. Many youth and young adults make their decisions about what is right and wrong based upon the relativity of circumstance rather than the absolute authority of God's Word.
>
> The message of the Gospel is compromised and weakened because of the sexual immorality among professing Christians. For example, a Muslim soccer coach confessed to me that he closed his ears to the Gospel message because of the rampant immorality that plagues the lives of many of the supposed Christians he has met.

If the church is unwilling to repent and continues to tolerate immoral behavior, its ability to be the "light of the world" will be extinguished. Our Lord Jesus warned the church at Pergamum not to tolerate teachings that endorse sexually immoral behavior (Revelation 2:14-16).

Like the church at Pergamum in the first century, the church today needs to repent of its immorality. If we do, then just as Pergamum was promised a white stone for overcoming, we too will be given a white stone (Revelation 2:17). What is this white stone? An athlete at that time, after winning a competition, was awarded a white stone—an admission pass to the winner's celebration. So too, believers who overcome will receive a white stone; their admission pass to Christ's eternal Kingdom.

Turn, Turn, Turn

Why did I turn from the pleasures of my past that seemed so normal before I knew the Lord?

First, God's Spirit revealed through His Word those activities to be contrary to His plan and purpose for human beings. Second, I began to understand and became persuaded that they bring destructive consequences—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Third, I am convinced the Lord Jesus will one day establish His eternal kingdom, and I do not want to be excluded from it because I denied Him while pursuing temporary sensual pleasures in willful disobedience and rebellion. Therefore, I am willing, by His grace, to give up anything now for the hope I have in Him.

Out of Darkness

Broken lives, ruined marriages, traumatized families, diminished health, and damaged testimonies could be avoided if a fruit of the Spirit—self-control—is exercised. However, those who refuse to repent and endeavor to develop discipline, then God's discipline—whether it comes from reaping the consequences of seeds sown or through remedial judgments—will clean up many in the Body of

Christ who tolerate or flaunt immorality. (See the account of Zimri, recorded in Numbers 25:1-14.)

Our nation and the world at large are rapidly disintegrating morally. Time is running out as collapse seems imminent. As you see the Day of the Lord approaching, realize that each passing moment brings you closer to eternity. Priorities and pursuits need to change. Each person must repent of the sin and vileness in their lives and homes. God exhorts each of us to resist the pervasive spirit of apostasy and wanton immorality. He is calling His people to come out of Babylon:

> After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit.... For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality." I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities (Revelation 18:1-5, NASB).

The apostle Paul entreats us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and appearing of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13).

The apostle John encourages everyone who lives in the hope of Christ's return to purify themselves (1 John 3:2-3).

The apostle Peter tells us to live holy and godly lives as the day of the Lord approaches (2 Peter 3:9-14).

The Lord Jesus Christ admonishes us to remain faithful as that Day approaches.

If You Die Today?

All of us will either die a physical death, or be taken to Heaven in the rapture. Some of us will be with the Lord sooner than we think. So let us get introspective for a moment.

If you die today, where will the footprints of your life lead?:

- What will your financial records reveal were the priorities of your life?
- What will the literature in your home reveal?
- What will the sites visited on your computer, your e-mails and text messages disclose?
- How about the movies and television programs you watched? What message will the images and philosophies you allowed in your home leave for your family?
- Will you leave your family a legacy of faith or failure?

Challenge to God's People

During times of prayer and fasting the Lord has repeatedly spoken to my heart to challenge the Body of Christ to walk in holiness and purity. In spite of an increasingly corrupt world, He is coming back for a Bride without spot or blemish. So it is time His Church cleans up her act. This is a day and age for believers to evaluate our lives; examine what we are entertained by, contemplate what our minds are exposed to, consider the words we speak, and ponder the meditations of our heart. It is a time to purify our minds and bodies.

Each of us will be tried and tested in our pursuit of holiness and purity. The enemy will use every opportunity and method to pollute our minds with vile images and tempt us to compromise our lives with sinful behavior. We can and must resist by the might of His Spirit and the command of His Word.

The Church does not need pastors who merely tell us how human they are by confessing all their flaws and dark secrets. We need ministers who will show us how they overcame them by the power of God's Spirit and the authority of His Word. We need Christian leaders who will lead by godly example in a darkening and desperate

world. We need those who will inspire us to maintain disciplined lifestyles so we can be effective witnesses with testimonies that shine brightly for His glory.

Pastor Jim Weikal offers a word of admonition to the Church:

> We need leaders committed to the teaching of God's Word so believers know the biblical standards they are called to obey.

While God offers the *free* gift of salvation to everyone who will believe and receive, it is imperative that we seek to walk a path of strength and wisdom in pursuit of purity, maturity, and righteousness as we await the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

4

Modesty and Purity

An informative footnote on 1 Timothy 2:9, in *The Full Life Study Bible,* indicates that it is God's will for Christians to dress modestly and decently. Excerpts follow:

> The word "decency" (Greek *aidos*) implies a certain shame in exposing the body. It involves a refusal to dress in such a way as to draw attention to the body and to pass the boundaries of proper reserve. The source of modesty is in a person's heart or inner character. In other words, modesty is the outward manifestation of an inward purity.
>
> Dressing immodestly, which may excite impure desires in others, is as wrong as the immoral desire it provokes. No activity or condition justifies the wearing of immodest attire that would expose the body in such a way as to stimulate lust in someone else (Galatians 5:13; Titus 2:11-12).
>
> It is a sad commentary on any church when the biblical standard for modest dress is ignored and the world's customs are passively adopted. In a day of sexual permissiveness, the church should act and dress differently from a corrupt society that throws aside and ridicules the Spirit's desire for modesty, purity and godly restraint (Romans 12:1-2).

Why Modesty?

Rosemary Lozier, a staff writer for Bill Rudge Ministries, shares the following thoughts on modesty:

> Eve had it, Bathsheba had it, and Delilah certainly had it. I'm talking about the ability that women have to use, or

misuse, our God-given trait of persuasion. As Christian women, we have a responsibility to set a godly example before others, especially younger women and girls.

Much has been said about teenage girls and how they dress. Who is instructing them on this subject? Who is influencing them? Is it the world, or are they learning it at home? Are they dressing appropriately or are they dressing according to their friends' standards? These questions are not meant to bash parents or to lay blame. We all know that sometimes, even though children may come from a godly home with wonderful Christian parents, a child (especially in the teen years) may decide that he or she would rather follow the influence of this world.

Perhaps, as mentors and parents we could ask ourselves if we are doing all we can to set a good example to the young people in our church. The Bible instructs "older women to be reverent in the way they live" so they can train the younger women to "be self-controlled and pure" (Titus 2:3-5).

It's not just women and girls, the Bible also speaks to older men about setting an honorable example to the younger men and boys: "Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled" (Titus 2:2, 6).

Young men, don't allow yourself to be in a situation where you might give in to temptation and get caught up in something that you will regret—and could change the entire rest of your life. God speaks of this in His Holy Word as a warning in the book of Judges, chapters 16 to 18. Samson was a handsome man blessed by God with extraordinary strength. Yet he was completely overtaken by Delilah's seductive beauty. Sadly, this cost Samson everything—his strength, his eyesight, his freedom and ultimately, his life.

> This may sound extreme, but you—young women and young men—may think a thing like how you dress or how you speak isn't that big of a deal; a small inconsequential thing. But seemingly small things—like lust—can have big consequences. Besides, everything we do as professing Christians is important because it sets the tone for our testimony. If we profess to follow Jesus, then what we do and even what we wear should honor God (Colossians 3:17).
>
> So, to all Christians whatever your age, the next time you are getting ready for the day, whether going to church, shopping, or just hanging out with your friends, think about what message you will be sending in the way you dress or how you speak. Will others see Christ honored through you? Or will they see you displaying and promoting yourself? I leave you with this: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2).

The Root of Modesty

Darlinda McDonald, another ministry staff writer, shares some additional insight on modesty:

> The booklet, *Style*, by Wally Kubitz, reveals the slippery slope that we have been sliding down for the last nearly 100 years: "In the 1920s & 30s, briefer swimwear appeared which lead to the introduction of the bikini in 1946. By the late 40s and early 50s, Alfred Kinsey's questionable studies popularized the notion that bedroom intimacy was a public, not a private, topic so the environment was ripe for a nudie magazine like *Playboy* to make its debut in the mid-50s. In the 1960s, the "sexual revolution" arrived on the scene opening the door for Mary Quant's mini-skirt. Quant was not shy in declaring that the miniskirt's purpose "was to dress

women so men would 'feel like tearing the wrapping off'" (*People* magazine, 1988). The 1970s followed with short-shorts, also known as "hot pants." Between 1960 and 2000, the divorce rate doubled, unmarried cohabitation increased tenfold, and babies born out-of-wedlock increased six-fold.

It should come as no surprise then, that our young people are confused. Society as a whole has become desensitized to "the sin that does so easily beset us" and accepts behaviors that even twenty years ago would have been deemed unacceptable. James 1:15 states, "Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin." Modesty matters. The truth is that immodesty (skimpy clothing, seductive behavior) leads to temptation, that leads to immoral thoughts (lustful thinking), that leads to action (physical sin).

How we see ourselves before God is at the root of modesty. When we understand and believe that we are precious children of God, bought with a price and loved beyond measure, everything we say and do will be influenced by that knowledge. Just as children who feel loved by their parents want to please them, we also will desire to please our heavenly Father.

Recognizing that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, our desire will be to honor God—not only by how we dress—but also by keeping our bodies pure and undefiled.

5

"But We're in Love"

Many youth "hookup" for a casual sexual encounter thinking there are no strings attached, but invisible cords—like undetected parasites in the bloodstream—begin to envelop their thoughts, emotions, and behavior.

Then there are those young people who reason, "We love each other, so what harm is there in having a physical relationship?" Yet, this only reveals that the true meaning of the word "love" has been lost in our culture. According to the Bible, if you truly love someone, you want the best for that person, and you are patient with them. First Corinthians 13:4-7 says:

> Love is patient, love is kind…it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered…does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects….

Shawn, whose story you read a brief highlight of in the "Rampant Immorality" chapter, related the following concerning his and *Edith's* early dating experience:

> *Edith* was a believer in Christ; I was not. I thought premarital sex would cement our relationship but it did the opposite. My coercing her into premarital sex caused guilt and resentment in her towards me, which was the beginning of our emotional separation.

Being pressured to prove you love your boyfriend or girlfriend by giving them what they want or being coerced to satisfy their sexual desires is not love, but lust.

If your "lover" really cared about you and really desired the best for you, he or she would want to protect you from anyone—including himself or herself—who might hurt you. Asking you to do something

that violates your convictions, risks immediate, and possibly, long-term adverse consequences, and jeopardizes your future happiness, is not love. It is selfishness and foolishness.

One day your boyfriend uses promises of undying love in a passionate attempt to seduce you, but what happens once he is satisfied? What happens if a car wreck disfigures your face? What happens if a degenerative disease ravages your body? Will he reject you? True love is much deeper than physical attraction and should be based on lasting commitment.

The one who truly loves you will be there if you lose a leg in a tragic accident or are maimed on the field of battle. A committed partner will stay with you even though disease or age decreases your physical beauty.

The Sexual Revolution

I was a teen during the 1960s sexual revolution. Before it started, most guys and girls were virgins. An honorable girl required a marriage license before she would have sex. A guy wanting intimacy with his girlfriend had to patiently wait until she married him. My generation changed all that. My friends and I did everything possible and used every line imaginable to weaken a girl's resistance. We took advantage of the growing sexual revolution to exploit our self-centered sexual desires. Our slogan was, "Free love and free sex." We would brag and laugh about our conquests, often sharing tangible evidence.

The following comments concerning Woodstock and the apostle Paul's perspective on casual sex are excerpted from *None of These Diseases,* a fascinating book by S. I. McMillen, M.D. and David E. Stern, M.D.:

> During three days in August 1969 on a farm near Woodstock, New York, the youth of America declared the founding of the "Woodstock Nation"—the land of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. A huge crowd of 500,000 camped in a muddy meadow. There they wallowed in free sex, illegal drugs, and angry music. They got what they wanted. But

did they want what they got? They wanted free sex. For a lifetime they got herpes, genital warts, PID, and a host of other STDs.

The Apostle Paul grew up in the pagan city of Tarsus, where a visitor complained that you couldn't walk in the streets without hearing the panting and grunting of brothel customers. Since Paul grew up surrounded by this cesspool of bawdy sex, you might expect his writings to embrace casual sex; but Paul's writings made a clean break from Roman culture. In effect, Paul urged believers, when in Rome, do not do as the Romans: "God wants you to live differently from those around you and to avoid loose sex. Treat your own bodies with dignity and respect. Don't abuse them in lustful passion, as your godless neighbors do" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).

A Proper Time…A Proper Place

Many say, "Sex is natural, so why fight it?" But so is fire! Controlled, it provides light and warmth. Uncontrolled, it ravages and destroys. Just ask the people I met while serving as a chaplain during the California wildfires. The excitement of illicit sex is short-lived. More often than not, it leads to *fears* and *tears*. Fear of being caught or of contracting an incurable disease or of an unwanted pregnancy; and tears from suffering adverse consequences, a devastated spouse once your infidelity is found, and the resulting shattered trust in one's marriage or relationship.

The best protection against sexually transmitted diseases is to practice mutual faithfulness with one lifetime spouse. Isn't it interesting this is exactly what God commanded from the beginning? Within the framework of a God-ordained marital relationship, sex is one of the most pleasurable experiences this side of Heaven. After all, He invented it with all its passion and excitement. The Song of Solomon in the Bible introduces us to the wonder and passion of sexuality.

God designed marital sex for pleasure and procreation. The feelings and emotions generated in a trusting and faithful marriage make the sexual experience far more intense and enjoyable. However, sex outside of marriage can be very destructive. Sex is powerful enough to create a new life. Then you have several choices. You can have an abortion. Yet God gives no one the right to take an innocent life. Call it what you want (a blob of tissue) and give any reason you choose (It's my body), but what is coming out of you are arms and legs and hearts and brains and feet and toes. You know it. They are babies who want to live—just like you and I do. You may give the baby up for adoption or attempt to raise the child yourself. However, these choices are very difficult and with radical results that affect many lives. You can get married, but such marriages are usually turbulent and rarely last. Much wiser is to follow God's advice and wait to have sex until you are in a loving and committed marriage.

A good motto for youth and unmarried adults is: "Hands off. Clothes on." Avoid being alone with your boyfriend or girlfriend, and instead of sexual discussions, talk more about your faith and biblical convictions.

Ran Away and Married

As new Christians in our teens, my girlfriend and I desired to live for the Lord and not sin against Him, so we ran away and got married. Although we had not yet read the following verse, we unknowingly did what it said:

> But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Corinthians 7:9).

I was also blessed to marry a virgin—something I did not deserve, but for which I was greatly appreciative. Although our marriage was given little hope by anyone (and almost ended early on), with the Lord's help, ours is one of the few teen marriages to survive and flourish.

A Mark of True Love

According to BJ Rudge, Ph.D.:

> Self-control is a highly esteemed virtue in the Bible, but is no longer in today's culture, especially regarding sexuality. The motto of our culture is simply to "enjoy the moment," allowing our passions to control us. "If it feels right, then just do it" has become the defining mark in the expression of "true love" between a man and a woman.
>
> The tragedy that has resulted from this type of thinking has not only been the proliferation of STDs, unwanted pregnancies, extramarital affairs and divorce, but a culture of people who have never experienced the beauty of truly loving someone or being truly loved by another!
>
> In contrast to lust that seeks self-gratification, the Bible calls us to live a life of self-control (1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8). The Word of God commands Christians to resist "…ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:12).
>
> A healthy relationship is not built upon self-pleasing lust, but upon self-controlled love. Self-control is a mark of true love and maturity because it reminds us not to look at another person merely as a means to fulfill our lusts and desires, but to seek in them a worthy and virtuous end.

Are You Being Conditioned?

A young man told me he could not keep his hands off his girlfriend. He justified his behavior by reasoning that at least they were not "going all the way." Besides, they planned to get married someday. I explained that premarital sex—even with one's future spouse—makes both more vulnerable to extramarital affairs. When I explained he was weakening her resistance to be victimized by someone else later on, he quickly realized he did not want her being vulnerable to other guys now, or in the future if he married her. What could happen during an extended illness or being away on a

long business trip? When boredom comes or temptation arises from the attention of a seductive person, those who were conditioned to receive instant gratification are more likely to have an extramarital fling in the future.

In contrast, I told this young man if he and his girlfriend showed self-control when they were together, they would be more inclined to show self-restraint when they were apart—reducing the risk of being enticed or seduced by someone else after marriage. That is why when I meet with couples who want to get married, I encourage them to refrain from sexual activity from that point on. I point out that of all the girls and guys in the world, they have chosen each other. By exercising self-discipline over sexual desires with each other now, it will help to affair-proof their marriage later.

Keeping Yourself Pure

Regarding sex, God says, "Wait till marriage and keep it only between you and your spouse." There is a time and a place for everything, and in this case, after the wedding is the time and your marriage partner is the place. It was not easy in the apostle Paul's day and it is not easy today to keep one's heart and mind pure. Merely a turn of the head or an innocent glance of the eyes can reveal sights and provoke thoughts, that if left unrestrained, would lead to anything but purity.

Nevertheless, everyone who has the hope of one day seeing and being with Christ "purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). Like a young virgin saving herself for her husband on their wedding night, we must strive to be spiritually and morally pure. Keeping our thoughts and lives unpolluted is a command, a challenge, and a believer's calling.

The Lesson of the Oak Tree

While driving to the airport and pondering my message for an upcoming speaking engagement, I noticed a large fallen oak tree split down the middle by an apparent lightning strike. I glanced at that massive tree and contemplated how it took a lifetime for it to reach its full potential and stately beauty, yet fell to the ground in

one brief moment from a random bolt of lightning. So, too, a lifetime of virtue can be forever tarnished in one random, passionate moment. Both nature and hormones, although intended by our Creator to be a purposeful blessing, can become a destructive curse if they get out of control. While a tree cannot protect itself from the forces of nature, you can and must safeguard yourself from the devastating forces of sexual immorality.

I Knew a Couple...

...who had a great marriage. In comparison to almost everyone else, their marriage was very good, but it could have been even better. While dating, and during the beginning of their marriage, they were careless. In spite of forgiveness and deep love, neither one totally trusted the other. She wanted his love and attention, and although he gave much to her, try as hard as he might, he could not give his total self to her. She sensed this and as a result they both suffered. They loved each other deeply, but something was missing because they each had given a part of themselves away. Although neither of them could live without the other, it was sometimes hard for them to live together. Most of their problems stemmed back to when they had violated each other's trust.

One day they realized they had not truly forgiven each other. He also realized he did not love her as Christ loved the Church. He repented and attempted to do so, which greatly improved their relationship. A life-threatening disease forced them to forget the past and focus even more on loving each other. She needed his total love and commitment and he gave it to her as best as he could. The restoration of her trust in him, and the security she felt because of his faithfulness, proved crucial in her return to health.

If only they had obeyed God's guidelines from their youth, they could have avoided all the scarring and trauma they put each other through for so many years. By God's grace they are now experiencing the kind of marriage God intended from the beginning.

They have discovered that a lifetime is not long enough to be with the one you love.

6

Sexual Fantasy World Is Far from Reality

Marketing gurus know the accuracy of the adage, "Sex sells!" As a result, commercials, talk shows, reality programs, documentaries, and the news are laced with sexual language and imagery. "Restrictive morality" is not tolerated as people demand uncensored freedom to do whatever they want. However, the expression of every conceivable sexual passion only leads to slavish addiction. Titus 3:3 states:

> At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures….

Those who indulge in pornography and illicit sex set in motion a process that can quickly become out of control. Harmful patterns develop which cause a person to struggle with immoral thoughts, lustful fantasies, and impulsive behavior. Sexual addiction is never healthy and always brings forth abuse and pain. Guilt, worry, fear, stress, sickness, premature aging, sexually transmitted diseases, extramarital affairs, marriage problems and family chaos, with children following in their parents' footsteps, are often the price to be paid. The sexual fantasy world created by the entertainment industry is far from reality. This encompasses every type of sexual activity and experience conceivable. Nevertheless, people are influenced by what they see, hear and feel—only to eventually discover it is not as satisfying as the media's distorted and sensationalized portrayal led them to believe.

As the Grass Fades

The most attractive people in the world will, in a few *short* years, lose much of their beauty. Their "perfect" bodies and good looks will give way to sags and wrinkles. Just visit a nursing home and compare the residents to their youthful pictures.

A sports festival I attended included men and women at their peak of *perfection*: massive muscles from steroids; chiseled bodies from intense training; high energy—seemingly youthful and vivacious.... But a second look beyond the glamor revealed visible flaws from aging, sun damaged skin, over training and overdosing. I saw many who just a few years earlier were at their pinnacle, but now were limping with bad knees, hips, or backs; faces engraved with wrinkles, sculpted bodies with extended bellies and hernias, tattoos that looked grotesque from shrinking muscles and shriveling skin, varicose veins from overexertion and overstraining, or surgical scars on shoulders and knees from injuries caused by lifting excessive amounts of weight.

Sooner or later, we come to realize that youth and vigor fade like the waning summer days of September. David said it this way:

> As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more (Psalm 103:15-16).

Life goes by too quickly to disregard the Word of the Lord for a few short years of fleeting indulgence. Chasing after worldly pleasures and possessions is as foolish as denying the inevitable effects of aging. It is, as Solomon said from personal experience, all futility (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

Change of Perspective

As we grow older, and hopefully wiser, our outlook changes. It is good that God uses the aging and degeneration of our physical bodies to detour our desires from the delights of this world to more of a focus on Eternity. The passions and pleasures of this world fade like the flexibility and suppleness of one's aging joints.

Some of what was fun for me as a teenager is now foolishness. Some of what I considered boring and weak back then, I recognize as wise and strong today. Some of what I thought was a waste of time and irrelevant then, is now a priority and passion. Much of what I swiftly ran to then, I avoid today; what I fled from then, I embrace today. My perspective has dramatically changed since coming to know the Lord. It is practically diametrically opposed to what it was as a teenager before I gave my life to Christ. With years comes experience, and through experience, comes a new viewpoint.

Some people turn away from the sins of their youth because they have come to know the Lord and have experienced the joy of being forgiven and the peace of walking with Him. Others do so because they are forced by circumstance or they have gotten too old to indulge in them. Whatever it takes, I hope you have amended your attitude and behaviors that are contrary to God's nature and His purpose in creating you, and which adverse consequences are warned about in the pages of Scripture! It is far better to make the changes while you have the choice than to wait until you are forced to do so.

Nourish Your Spirit

One day your physical body will wear out; muscles will shrink, bones will weaken, and skin will sag. Eventually your body will cease to function and will return to the dust from which God created it—but your spirit lives forever! In light of this certainty, my suggestion is to spend more time nourishing your spirit through Bible study and prayer than you do gratifying the flesh.

> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly [the physical body] we are wasting away, yet inwardly [the eternal spirit] we are being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Hopefully, we have gained enough wisdom over the years to learn what is pleasing to the Lord, and acquired enough respect and reverence for our Creator to avoid that which dishonors Him. David goes on to write in Psalm 103:

> But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear [reverence] him, and his righteousness with their children's children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts (Psalm 103:17-18).

David confidently proclaimed in the closing verse of his most famous psalm:

> I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever (Psalm 23:6).

Time is the "great equalizer." It has a way of catching up with us—as do our circumstances. If you have not yet discovered, you will, that what mattered most in your younger years, matters little when you are older, and what mattered little when you were young, matters most as you get older. The things of this earth will grow strangely dim as the hope of a new, immortal body, a better world, and Eternity shines all the brighter. May the longing of our hearts be to be with the Lord Jesus Christ and inherit all He has prepared for those who love Him and obey His Word.

Words of Wisdom from Solomon

It would be expedient to heed the wisdom of Solomon: His search in riches and pleasure inspired him to conclude the book of Ecclesiastes with the following admonition:

> However many years a person may live, let them enjoy them all. But remember that days of darkness will be many. Rejoice while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but remember that you must give an account to God for everything you do.
>
> Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before you grow old and no longer enjoy living—before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you say, "I find no pleasure in them." The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: Fear [Reverence] God and obey His commands, for this is the duty of every person. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether

good or evil. *(Adapted from Ecclesiastes 11:8-9 and 12:13-14.)*

Two Worldviews

The lure of the world through television, movies, the internet, music, magazines, books, and other venues can be hard to resist. However, if we do not resist, we will be infected with a philosophy and lifestyle diametrically opposed to God's revelation of truth and which will ultimately destroy us. First John 2:16-17 gives a clear perspective:

> For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

There are two opposing worldviews vying for our allegiance: One encourages us to flaunt our freedom by watching and indulging in whatever we desire. The other, which is God's perspective, calls us to maturity and purity. It tells us that fornication and adultery are contrary to His will and that there should not even be a hint of sexual immorality among believers (Ephesians 5:3-5).

The Bondage of "Freedom"

Have you noticed that when people demand their right for uninhibited license to do whatever they want—no matter how perverted—the more enslaved they become? When virtually all sexual taboos are removed, what is the result? Sexually transmitted diseases, abortions, divorces, broken relationships and a never ending—yet never fulfilled—longing for love. When will we figure it out and get back to God's standards?

Since God is the Creator and knows what is ultimately best for His creation, wisdom dictates we submit to His perspective and avoid the certain, adverse consequences of ignoring and disobeying His directives.

Those Who Triumphed

Besides numerous illustrations concerning negative consequences I gave in the chapter on "Rampant Immorality," there are parallel examples of those who have triumphed by either avoiding involvement in sexual immorality or from eventually being set free. The following recount just a few (plus others I will share throughout this book).

Chad's wife discovered he was viewing pornography on the internet. Facing possible separation, he was motivated to get help. Christian counseling helped him to identify the root of his problem. Communication with, and accountability to his wife and the Lord, not only helped him to overcome his addiction, but also enabled him to help others who struggled with addiction to pornography.

Wanda had a problem with alcohol and exhibitionism. She usually dressed provocatively, but when she drank too much she let everything hang out. Her marriage almost ended because her husband did not know what to do with her. Some Christians befriended her and invited her and her husband to church. They both made a commitment to Christ and a marvelous transformation of their lives and marriage began.

Brad had an opportunity to begin an affair with an attractive woman. Realizing the consequences he would inflict upon his life, he resisted the temptation. Fifteen years later he unexpectedly saw her. After seeing how unattractive she had become, he was appalled to think he would have lost his marriage and family for her, and was grateful that the Lord protected him.

Bud and *Carol's* marriage was beyond hopeless. Before the final collapse, a friend recommended a Christian retreat for troubled marriages. The two weeks spent there helped to put their marriage back together, better than ever.

Angie had been promiscuous since she was a teen, following the pattern of her mother. Now in her thirties and with a husband and children, Angie's life was falling apart. Her sexual addiction and illicit relationships with numerous men were destroying her marriage and life. Wanting the destruction to end, she asked the Lord's

forgiveness. Realizing she truly wanted to be set free from her addiction, her husband stayed with her, and together they committed their lives to the Lord and to the rebuilding of their marriage.

Phil walked to the back of the commercial airline on which he was a passenger to use the facilities when a flight attendant asked him if he was single. Thinking it concerned his seating assignment he inquired, "Why do you ask?" She pointed to an attractive flight attendant as she told him her friend wanted to know. Having already made a covenant with the Lord not to compromise thru an illicit affair, he responded that he was married. As he walked back to his seat she said, "You have beautiful eyes." He thanked her and then headed back to his seat to rejoin his wife. During their drive home from the airport Phil recounted this situation to his wife. She was pleased to have a faithful spouse who resisted the advances of another woman.

Teri was a virgin and determined not only to remain one until marriage but also to marry a virgin. She met an attractive guy while in her teens who, although he had been offered sex by many beautiful girls, resisted the temptation because of his commitment to Christ. Teri and John dated for many years and although the temptations were intense, they remained virgins until they married. Their testimonies and marital faithfulness are a great inspiration to many.

Samantha decided to quit the dating scene and not date again until she met the person she was going to marry. She learned from experience to keep her list of requirements high—seemingly impossible. One day she met the man she was to marry. He had been forgiven by the Lord for past mistakes and fulfilled all the biblical and personal standards Samantha had set. Their story of falling in love and life together is a powerful witness of God's forgiveness, faithfulness, and blessing.

Don, a middle-aged widower of eleven years, knows what a challenge it is to remain celibate and pure. He illustrates this by sharing the following:

Several months after the tragic death of her husband, I asked a coworker out to dinner. *Dara's* kind and gentle disposition made her a good companion and we would frequently talk while at work. When she asked if she could reciprocate the dinner one afternoon while she was on call, I accepted.

After dinner, she would have had to return to the medical facility where we worked and wait in the drab "on call" room. I thought it would be a nice gesture to show her my home and let her spend that time there instead. As we sat on the couch together talking, she suddenly made a suggestion we go upstairs to my bedroom and have some fun.

In amazement I was able to tell her in a cracking voice, "I don't think so!" Ten minutes after this proposition, my seventeen-year-old son and a friend unexpectedly came through the front door. I was horrified to think of the impression he would have had if I had said yes to Dara's proposition. My son would have been stunned and disappointed if he had seen us fumbling half clothed to shut the bedroom door. The story would no doubt spread to his siblings. My efforts to raise all my children properly on the issue of purity would be negated. I would have had to repent and try to recover the credibility that would surely have been lost.

Dara called me the next day to apologize for her behavior. I wonder if during her trip to the bathroom she had noticed the Bill Rudge Ministries' newsletter on sexual purity that was stacked on top of my other reading material?

I am grateful to God this episode ended as it did, in obedience, rather than giving in to a willing partner who offered me a momentary pleasurable experience, which would have resulted in dire consequences.

And there are MORE illustrations I could include about God's forgiveness and restoration and of the adults and teens who have remained untainted from the stains of immorality—triumphing in spite of temptation.

Over the years I have met many single people who have remained virgins and married couples whose faithful relationship to each other and the Lord has resulted in untold blessing, peace, and joy. Instead of settling for quick gratification, they clothed themselves in wisdom, strength, and self-control, and are receiving the rewards of their choices. Their stories would take volumes to tell because, like a beautiful chrysalis, the multitudes of blessings attained take a lifetime to unfold. However, the principles they live by are revealed throughout the pages of this book.

7

The Bondage of Pornography

With the click of a remote control or computer mouse, or the touch of a finger, anyone can enter the fantasy world of sexual promiscuity. As television programs and movies become more explicit and internet access becomes unlimited, the seductive domain of pornography—where all sorts of erotica and perversions are manifest—is available to virtually anyone at any time.

Countless people are entangled in a web of moral impurity because the lure of the flesh and the world is so strong. Many Christians have compromised biblical truth and personal conviction to become slaves again to the corruption and darkness from which Christ delivered them. As a result, those losing peace, health, and marriages are mounting. Before you get caught, or continue if you are already entrapped, in this slide into compromise and bondage, consider the following:

1) Intruder Alert

Pornography is an intruder in your life and home. Just as you would fight and resist an invader seeking to molest, rape, or kill your family, so too, you must fight and resist this intruder because it will destroy you and your family. You may never mean to hurt anyone by it, but you will. Your entire world will crash down around you if you do not disarm and subdue this intruder.

2) Violated Trust

Every girl and every guy is someone's daughter or son. Certainly no reasonable parent raises their child to be a sex object; nor do they give them in marriage to be exploited or cheated on by their mate. Those who discover their spouse's porn use, feel hurt, angry, and betrayed; wondering why they are not "sufficient" to satisfy

their partner. Porn is cited as a contributing factor in many marital breakups.

Pornographic indulgence and illicit sexual activities violate the trust of those who give their daughters and sons in marriage. It violates your wedding vows. It violates your commitment to the Lord. It violates yourself—as it is a sin against your own body (1 Corinthians 6:18). It also wastes your time, drains your energy, and ages you prematurely.

3) Addictive and Degrading

Pornography has the same effect on the brain that drugs do: It is addictive. It is also degrading. Temptation often strikes when you are bored or alone. People enact deeds in darkness, which they would be ashamed of in public. Users may experience a euphoric high while viewing porn, but it is quickly displaced by feelings of shame and disgust. Everyone involved in pornography is demeaned. Those who pose nude often regret it later. Those caught viewing porn by their spouse or children experience humiliation and a loss of respect—often difficult to regain.

4) Exposed

Scripture indicates that what is done in secret will eventually be openly exposed. If not in this life, then in the one to come. You WILL stand before your Creator and give an account of every secret thought and hidden sin. "Wait till the Lord comes. he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

5) Adultery in the Heart

The Bible strongly condemns adultery. Jesus clarified the meaning of adultery to include lusting in one's heart. Therefore, viewing pornography, mentally undressing someone, visualizing a sexual escapade, or fantasizing life and romance with another, are in reality adultery (Matthew 5:28).

Memories of pornographic visuals and sexual experiences can remain in the mind's eye for a lifetime—showing up unexpectedly or

at will—causing mental or verbal comparisons, criticisms, and conflicts. Lingering pornographic images can incite recurring lustful thoughts, temptations, and adultery in one's heart.

Pornography can make users less satisfied with their spouse and more withdrawn from their families. Former porn star Jessica Neely made this comment in an article on LifeSiteNews:

> Lust is something that is never going to be satisfied. It is a trap that makes you resent your wife. My job was to make you hate your wife. Lust is a monster that can never be satisfied. The very end-road of an all-consuming addiction is a guaranteed death. You are going to lose everything.

6) Lost Inheritance

Scripture is clear that those who live an unrepentant life of wanton sexual promiscuity will not inherit the kingdom of God. Such as:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10:

> …Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers…will inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery…orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Revelation 21:8:

> But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral…their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

Revelation 22:15:

> Outside [God's Holy City] are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral….

In New Testament times the term "dogs," when applied to people, referred to any one of low moral character. Such people will not be

permitted to enter God's eternal kingdom. When Scripture condemns the sexually immoral, it is not referring to those who may be struggling to overcome sexual sin. It is regarding those who say, "This is the way I am and I am going to keep on living this lifestyle." Such an unrepentant person will face eternal consequences.

7) Grieving His Spirit

The Holy Spirit is grieved every time a believer indulges in pornography and looks upon naked or scantily clad bodies. Instead of being conformed to the likeness of Christ and glorifying God with our minds and bodies—He is dishonored. The fallout is far reaching because nothing is worse than losing a sense of His presence in our lives. However, repentance and restoration are only a prayer away. Nothing is more satisfying than being in right relationship with the Lord! Mental purity is far more conducive to peace and internal youthfulness than the stress of a corrupt and polluted mind.

We have a choice. We can fill our mind and heart with lustful images and desires, or we can fill our mind and heart with God's Word and pure desires. To choose the first is death to our soul and crushes our prayer life. The second choice gives us life and *power in prayer*. Remember, rather than "looking with lust" desire "power in prayer."

8) Spiritual Strongholds

Pornography offers immediate gratification, but the spirit of lust is never satisfied. While the excitement of the moment seems irresistible, when you give in to the lure of pornography, you allow the enemy access to your mind and heart, creating a spiritual stronghold for him.

Investigator Sergeant, Patrick Crough, comments in his book *Seducers Among Our Children*:

> Once a man gets hooked on pornography he needs something more graphic for the same thrill effect. I truly believe he unwittingly invites a demon to take over his life. Eventually, his appetite becomes insatiable. I have interviewed child predators who claimed they were spawned

> as a result of their addiction to internet pornography. Some of the predators I interrogated told me that when they began viewing child pornography they knew deep down in their heart what they were doing was very wrong; but they had lost control and were unable to stop.

Lusting after naked flesh intensifies and ultimately descends into more degenerate visuals and activities that lead to deeper bondage, emptiness, and despair. Do not deceive yourself into thinking this will be your last look. There is always something new and a little more tantalizing that will lure you—unless you determine that your last look is already past.

There is nothing of value in pornographic web sites, magazines, or strip clubs—only despair, disease, death, and destruction. Opening yourself to these images and behavior is a quick road to bondage that can result in intense internal and spiritual warfare. It is not surprising that *many* spiritual, emotional, and marital problems can be traced to pornography. As you resist temptations and repeatedly walk—or run—away from them, this stronghold will eventually diminish. Each victory makes you stronger and weakens the enemy's hold on your life.

9) Prepare to Suffer

When you are enticed to look at pornographic web sites, view sensual movies, watch exotic dancers, leaf through pornographic magazines, or have an illicit sexual tryst, prepare to suffer. The few minutes of satisfaction will be short-lived, followed by a sense of guilt, shame, disgust, and misery until you are brought to repentance.

The psalmist learned from experience:

> Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees (Psalm 119:67, 71).

The apostle Peter tells us:

> He who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a

> result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God (1 Peter 4:1-2).

In the midst of a crisis, experiencing extreme pain, or feeling that you are close to death, you will not want your life filled with images and attitudes that dishonor your Lord. Remember, those who do not willingly give up depraved indulgences, will one day be forced to.

10) Reap What You Sow

If you cheat on your spouse—even through pornography—be assured that while you are indulging in your fantasy, the enemy is seeking someone or something to lure away your spouse and family members. He is working behind the scenes to destroy more than just you. He knows that when you are compromised and neutralized he can have easy access to your loved ones. King David's sexual sins ultimately resulted in the unleashing of perverse immorality in his family—victimizing not only him, but those he dearly loved.

Fear, guilt, confusion, loss of health, and other negative consequences are the end product reaped from the sowing of sexual sin. Too many have damaged their marriages, traumatized their spouse and children, tarnished their testimony, and grown old before their time.

11) Show It All

Pornographic magazines and web sites want the freedom to "show it all." Then let them show it all—by including pictures of genital herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, AIDS, monkey pox, and other STDs. While they are at it, why not show the aborted babies, broken marriages, devastated children, and ruined lives?

I had not seen pornography for many years until a hacker sabotaged two of our ministry videos posted on another Christian web site. While doing the occasional monitoring of our videos, vile and disgusting pornographic images appeared on the computer screen. We immediately removed our videos from that site so no unsuspecting person would be enticed and entrapped.

I pondered how my perspective on pornography had so drastically changed. Before knowing Christ, what was attractive and pleasurable had become pathetic and repulsive. It nauseated me for several days till the images slowly faded from my mind's eye. I felt sorry for the people displayed in the visuals because they are the real victims—used to make someone money, possibly riddled with disease, empty, unfulfilled. My perspective has so changed that purity and righteousness are far more attractive than sensuality and immorality promoted by the aggressive tactics of pornographers. Keep this concept in mind: What you think you want and desire now, may later in life, repulse and sicken you.

Shelley Lubben was a former porn star. Now she tells the hardcore truth as she rips the seductive mask off of pornography and exposes the "secret" side of porn. Pornography is modern day slavery for thousands of women and the millions of porn addicts who can't stop clicking. Shelley's book, *Truth Behind the Fantasy of Porn: The Greatest Illusion on Earth*, reveals an industry that tries to portray a world of glamour and pleasure but in truth, the adult film world consists of brutality, degradation, threats, manipulation, rape, trafficking, disease, drug and alcohol abuse, depression, and suicide. Her spectacular journey from childhood sexual abuse, to prostitution, to the deadly unglamorous realm of porn sets, to her powerful story of redemption offers a message of hope to the entire world.

Blood On Your Hands

The following excerpts from "Facing the Ugly Truth" by Dr. John Neihof, in the *afaJournal* are used with permission:

> Their physical features are often beautiful. Their sexual appetites are legendary. Their audience is vast. Yet they live lives filled with torment. They are sex workers, porn actors, exotic dancers, and prostitutes. Hollow eyes. Soulless gazes. Empty. Hard. Aged. Exploited. Addicted.
>
> Lexi's story was in the news. A porn actress, Lexi tried to get sober. Her boyfriend died of a heroin overdose. Now, she is dead, cause of death unknown. Lexi is one of

countless victims who have lost their lives, their families, their hopes, their minds, their bodies, and their dreams to the "adult" entertainment industry.

Do you care?

Did you contribute to Lexi's bondage, endangerment, and death? Do you have blood on your hands? If you visit the websites, buy the content, lust after the fantasies, and gratify yourself via the entertainment, you are the problem. The pornography industry cannot exist without customers. If you are one, you are a 21st century slave owner. You are ensuring bondage, disease, addiction, and death.

One more victim

I first met Melissa when she was 16. She was serving a banquet at a Christian school. Later, she enrolled in Bible college. But Melissa had unresolved issues. A family history of sexual abuse complicated her life, leading to sexual sin and dismissal from Bible college. She eventually "hooked up" with Tim and bore two children to him.

When money was tight, he demanded Melissa work as an erotic dancer. Her income, he insisted, was needed to make ends meet. To work up the nerve to perform such an indignity, she got drunk. Alcohol numbed her emotions enough to cope with the shame. When she and Tim broke it off, he took the kids. He had money. She had nothing except fading beauty and growing shame. A brief item in a Michigan newspaper featured her death from drug overdose.

And you say your porn habit hurts no one. Ask Lexi. Ask Melissa. Oh, no—you can't. They're dead, victims of a culture gone mad with sexual sin.

Romance Novels

Women's romance novels, love stories, and "chick flicks" can be equally as dangerous as men's pornographic magazines. Dr. Harry W.

Schaumburg points this out in his book *False Intimacy: Understanding the Struggle of Sexual Addiction:*

> While most men are sexually stimulated by visual cues, reading romance novels and fantasizing may be the female counterpart. Romance novels are more than entertainment; they are sexually stimulating. Women can not only read them; they can "borrow" the romance. Such false intimacy with no risk is essentially no different from the intent of a man who hires an escort service. Most Christian women rightfully object to men having explicit sexual material such as *Playboy*, but some of those same women would be offended if anyone suggested romance novels be banned. Seductive images come in both pictures and words, but both provide a false intimacy.

8

Not in My Home

The following article was written by Cliff McNeely and is sure to be an eye-opening challenge.

You may think me crazy, but lately, several nights a week, I've invited strange, and sometimes obscene, people into my home—people I don't really know and with whom I would normally not associate. They show up at around 7 p.m. most evenings and leave right at 10 p.m. I can ask them to leave at anytime but I don't. I just sit there, usually not saying a word, and let them do pretty much whatever they want until they decide it's time to leave.

The other night, one of my new acquaintances, Donna, ordered her husband, Jimmy, to make love to her right then and there in my living room. She said that if he didn't, she'd know her pregnant body repulsed him. A couple of weeks ago, a guy named Calvin and a woman (I don't recall her name) showed up in my house. They evidently were going to be rooming together in an apartment. And while he thought she was a lesbian, she thought he was gay. It turns out they were both heterosexuals; but before they realized their misjudgment, they had a fairly explicit sexual conversation while I listened in.

And speaking of homosexuals, I recall another evening in the more recent past when a married man named Ford announced to his wife, right there in my home, that he was gay. And then I listened in as another man phoned Ford and asked him out on a date. This really made me uncomfortable but, again, I did or said nothing to discourage this from happening in my own home.

About a week before the above incident, and I'm terribly ashamed to tell this story, a man named Peter brought a prostitute into my home. I watched as he solicited sex from her and then, to my horror,

she began to undress right there in front of me. They had a sexual conversation so repugnant that I can't even repeat its content. I heard words that night I would never use in my own home. All the while I sat there unmoved, passively taking it all in.

While sitting in church last week, an image came to mind of a woman standing in my living room. In the image, this woman's husband, his mistress, and several of their friends were also there with us in the room. And this woman, in an attempt to humiliate her husband, unbuttoned her shirt and bared her breasts to everyone. Again, the image was somewhat fuzzy but nonetheless disturbing. But when these kinds of things occur with so much regularity in my home, it's virtually impossible for me to stop the memories from resurfacing at random in my mind.

I've even sat by without response as people I don't even know have had the gall to ridicule my faith and my God right in front of me, in my own home! They've mocked and stereotyped Christians as fanatical, hypocritical and insulting. I've also witnessed unspeakable acts of violence, rape, and torture. I fear I will never be rid of these negative and damaging memories. I wish now I would have said something, done something, to keep these obscene things from happening under my roof, in the sanctuary of my own home.

The sad fact is that these obscene and violent acts are happening in millions of homes all across America…every time a TV set is turned on without forethought and discernment. That's right, every one of the scenes and conversations described above have happened on network television over the past few weeks.

Only you can control who or what comes into your home. Before sitting down in front of the set tonight for an evening of seemingly harmless entertainment, ask yourself the following questions: Who have I invited into my living room lately through my TV set? Would I allow the same kinds of conversations and actions to happen in my home in real life? How is watching these kinds of shows benefiting or harming myself and my family? And finally, if Jesus Christ were sitting beside me, what would I watch on TV, if anything?

(*Preview Family Movie & TV Review,* October 12, 1999. Used by permission.)

9

The Media Connection

Sexual immorality was rampant in the ancient Roman Empire. Banquets often degenerated into orgies. Many cities in which the apostle Paul ministered were noted for temple prostitutes, brothels, and promiscuity. In the Roman culture of his day, this type of behavior was acceptable, but Paul revealed to the Gentile converts that sexual immorality was not acceptable to God. Paul's words to the early church are as relevant today as they were then. He reminds us that God calls believers to a higher standard and requires us to "live self-controlled, upright and godly lives" (Titus 2:12).

Disgusting

Several years ago as I was heading home through a nearby neighborhood, I witnessed a disgusting behavior. I thought, "That's repulsive. How could anyone do such a thing?" Have you ever seen someone do something disgusting? While it may have been repulsive to you, it was obviously acceptable to the person or persons doing it.

Consider for a moment your behavior and activities. Are any of them disgusting or detestable to God? If we believe God created us and that Scripture is His revelation of truth, then it is imperative we learn what is pleasing to Him so we can do it and avoid what is displeasing to Him. Proverbs 8:13 tells us that to fear the Lord is to hate evil. Evil and sin are anything that is contrary to His nature or will. Ephesians 5:10 admonishes us to find out what pleases the Lord.

A Love Story

In 1970, when Karen and I were teenagers and had not yet given our lives to Christ, we went to see *Love Story*, supposedly one of the most romantic movies ever made. We loved the story about a young

couple who crossed social barriers, married, and ultimately faced her untimely death.

On a date night 38 years later we decided to rent this movie thinking it had to be safe since it was made so long ago and we could not recall any questionable content. However, we quickly realized its message was diametrically opposed to what we now believe. About five minutes into the movie, Karen went to bed but I stayed up to watch excerpts in order to write the following illustration:

- Jennifer (played by Ali MacGraw) and Oliver (played by Ryan O'Neal) engage in premarital sex (implied, though no nudity). Karen and I now realize the blessings of sexual purity and the adverse consequences for those who engage in premarital sex.
- Jennifer uses God's name in vain frequently. Karen and I now praise His name.
- Jennifer is dying of cancer with no visible faith or mention of God. In contrast, Karen, who was diagnosed with cancer, has hope through Jesus Christ and her whole life focuses on Him.
- Oliver is alienated, hostile, and defiant toward his father and has virtually no relationship with his mother. Karen and I have close relationships with our children. We love being with them and our grandchildren, who are intertwined in our lives and ministry.

As teens, we were unknowingly influenced by *Love Story*. It was not until 38 years later we realized both the influence and impact this movie (and others) had on our beliefs and behaviors during our teen years. The sad truth is that *Love Story* is mild by today's standards. The damaging influence of today's movies is far greater than most people realize. Be discerning. Reject what is not true or beneficial.

Your Standards

I have discovered people like to condemn those who have lower standards than themselves and to mock those who have higher ones. It is also interesting that people with lesser convictions like to pressure those with higher ones to compromise them. Yet they rarely want to elevate their own. Nevertheless, everyone—even those who deny it—have boundaries and a code of conduct by which they live.

When a Christian comments that my convictions regarding television are too strict, I ask them, "Do you watch pornography in your home?" Most quickly respond, "No!" I then point out that there are those who think their standard of not watching pornography is restrictive and self-righteous. They usually get the message.

The real question is, "Will your standards and mine really matter if they are not God's?" Will He say, "At least you did not do this, therefore you did well." It may be commendable that you do not tolerate blatant nudity and sex acts in your home, but do you allow swearing, profanity, crude and vulgar comments, or sexual humor and innuendos? Are you a biblical or a cultural Christian? Do you live by the truth and principles in God's Word, or merely conform to the world's standards? Or does your life reflect the values and philosophies of a corrupt generation and compromised church? God's standard is filling our lives and homes with that which reflects His nature, brings glory to Him, and is truly beneficial to our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

What Is Wrong?

The sad reality is that many undiscerning Christians are addicted to television. They justify their tolerance of obscene language and sexually suggestive content by explaining they see and hear more than that at work or school. While we are not responsible for what we have no control over, we are accountable for what we do have control over, and entertainment definitely falls into that category.

Persecution of Christians increases worldwide. Signs of the times are occurring all around us. The return of Christ draws nearer. The

Lord desires faithful followers to share the Gospel with a lost and dying world. Yet, something is wrong when professing Christians and pastors waste their time and their lives watching, without any conviction or remorse, programs laced with profanity and immorality.

"No Television" Fast

Although my family had limited television time and maintained strong guidelines, during a time of prayer and fasting I began to feel deep conviction. So in July of 1998, my wife and I made a fast unto the Lord that we would not watch television in our home. We determined our home and ministry center would be an oasis for our children and guests in the midst of an increasingly corrupt world. Only family videos and profitable programs of research or news of significant importance would be welcome.

It is amazing how much more time we had for Bible study, prayer, and ministry. Even my children commented on how much calmer the atmosphere had become.

Why have I kept television out of my home for all these years? Would a few programs a week undermine my family's commitment to Christ? No. However, I do believe television, as well as the internet, have destroyed the spiritual lives of more believers and pastors than probably anything else. If we are to win the battle of overcoming sexual immorality, we must achieve victory over what we watch, as well as what we listen to and read. Those who spend time engrossed in the media have little possibility of hearing God's voice and discovering His will. Besides, I do not want to sit in my home being entertained by something that often mocks my Lord and is ruining the spiritual life of many believers. I do not want my example to cause anyone to stumble.

The powerful influence of the media was vividly manifest several years ago when I returned to a small Caribbean island to minister. Ten years earlier the adults and youth were simple village people untainted by the television and the internet, but when I returned, the whole generation of youth was different—body piercings, tattoos, skimpy clothes, and hanging out at the mall. I asked one of the pastors sponsoring me if I had missed this part of their culture

when I was there ten years earlier. He assured me it was not there then. Then he informed me the current generation has recently been influenced by cable television, movies, music, and the internet.

I used to think the Amish were hypocritical for disallowing telephones in their homes and not owning vehicles, yet they will use someone else's phone or accept a ride in someone else's vehicle. However, after hearing their explanation that they are merely trying to limit worldly influences in their lives by keeping modern conveniences out of their homes, I can understand the reasoning for their lifestyle—though I do not necessarily agree with their definition of worldliness.

My desire is to have a house and ministry center filled with the presence of the Lord—free from the seductive influence of immorality oozing from many of the movies, talk shows, documentaries, and commercials into the minds and hearts of family members and guests. Because of the wickedness of the house of Eli, God removed the priesthood from his family. I did not want the influence of television to negate the call of God on my life or family.

Desensitized

As we made our home an oasis, I noticed my emotions and desires changing even more. I began to look at sexual immorality through new eyes. I saw it from God's perspective and realized how twisted and perverted His intended purpose for sex had become. After not seeing television programs or commercials for many months, and then being exposed to them at airports or in other people's homes, it became obvious how many Christians are desensitized by the media and do not discern the rapid degeneration of our society. Like the proverbial frog in the pot of water on the stove, the heat is being turned up and few recognize the dangers and the consequences.

It is amazing that what were sleazy, hard core porn movies (covertly shown when I was a youth) are now overtly viewed by young people at movie theaters and in their homes on television, videos, or computers. Even decent movies have previews of upcoming movies that often taint the minds of children. How can our

youth be exposed to so much seduction, nudity, and sex acts and not be influenced to experiment? Truly we are in a battle for the minds and souls of our young people—and us adults as well—as the pornification of our society accelerates.

About Guests

You may wonder what to do when you have guests in your home or you are a guest at someone else's home. I know it is awkward to turn off the television or change the channel if family and guests are watching something in your home that unexpectedly becomes offensive, or to walk out of the room at someone else's house when something comes on that violates your moral convictions. Yet it is even more awkward to just sit there during a sexually explicit scene or commercial. It is better to offend family and friends than the Lord.

Not Always This Way

I used to go to bed with thoughts and images of movies I had just watched lingering in my mind. I would wake up with vivid memories of what I had seen the night before. Much of my time during the day was spent discussing movies and sporting events. Now, most of that seems like such a waste to me.

When I go to bed at night, my thoughts are on the Lord and His Word. When I wake up in the morning, scriptural insight and ministry ideas often flood my mind. Throughout the day the meditations of my heart are focused on the Lord and His faithfulness. The words from my mouth are usually to witness to those who need Christ or to provide encouragement to those who already know Him.

Again, it wasn't always this way. As I have grown in my relationship with Jesus Christ and renewed my mind with His Word, my perspective and priorities have completely changed. Now, as I look back over my younger years, I regret the wasted time spent watching, reading, listening, and doing things that were negative influences and which took such a damaging toll on my life.

Strong Conviction

Watching objectionable movies in the privacy of your home or observing lustful materials while surfing the internet should be as uncomfortable for a committed believer as sitting in a pornographic movie theater or strip club. As a result, a growing number of Christians are being convicted to remove television and internet access from their homes or at least strictly monitor them.

My wife received the following letter from a freelance staffer for The 700 Club who filmed our daughter and her husband's testimony for a Valentine's Day special. She wrote:

> It was a joy to meet you in San Diego! Tabitha and Clay did such a terrific job (and Caeleana, too). When my husband and I were first married, we made a commitment to a "TV free" home for three months. My husband was the driving force behind this. He felt that our time would be better spent talking, praying, reading, or getting out. After three months of no TV, I was sold! Our home is so peaceful and we are able to really enjoy our moments together.

The Apostle Paul and TV

In 1999 my son and I traveled for three weeks with a group from Talbot School of Theology as we retraced the steps of the apostle Paul's missionary journeys. Considering the fact that Paul repeatedly warned New Testament believers to abstain from idolatry and sexual immorality, I asked the archeologist and biblical scholar leading the group, "How would the apostle Paul deal with television today?" He responded without hesitation, "The apostle Paul would not have a television in his home."

Most of the programs on television today flaunt the very things Paul told believers to avoid. Likewise, most of the material on television is diametrically opposed to the values and principles God inspired Paul to write about to the New Testament churches. Besides, Paul was too busy evangelizing his world and making disciples to waste time on unprofitable activities. The only use the

apostle Paul would have for television and the internet would be to evangelize the world and make disciples, and possibly for research.

It was the apostle Paul who urged the Philippians to let their minds dwell on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. There is no doubt, according to Paul's perspective, a believer's home should be filled with the truth of God's Word and praise to the Lord.

The TV Challenge

I have challenged many pastors and believers throughout the world to turn off their television for one month. During this month-long fast from television they are to avoid all unnecessary distractions and focus on reading only Scripture and spending time in prayer. The response has been incredible as so many have informed me that this was one of the most beneficial times in their lives. It helped them immensely in their walk with the Lord and gave them a whole new perspective.

Consider "fasting" from television, movies, and the internet as you seek the Lord and His Word for a week or more. Turn off your TV, shut down the computer, discontinue all social media, silence your cell phone, and earnestly consider the Lord's will for your life. Ask the Lord to open your eyes and speak to your heart concerning what He desires for you. Evaluate the programs, movies, sites, music, magazines, books, and activities that may be pulling you down or diverting your focus from Him. As Hebrews 12:1 encourages:

> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

In closing this chapter on the media connection, I want to make certain you realize that what you put in your mind is as crucial as what you keep out. So fill your mind with positive movies, music, magazines, and activities. Like food, do not just avoid what is bad for you; enjoy what is healthy and beneficial.

10

A Word to Victims

Victims of adultery, sexual abuse, and molestation experience a lifetime of pain, suffering, and trauma in exchange for the "pleasure" of the perverted offender. Turbulent feelings churn within like crashing waves of the sea during a great storm. Anger and revenge can easily become controlling forces of those navigating the rough waters of victimization and brokenness.

Some offended spouses of marital infidelity fall into the trap of "doing likewise" in retaliation against the one who betrayed them. They attempt to justify their "pay-back" affair or pornographic indulgence by blaming their unfaithful partner. However, it is a poor excuse to dishonor the Lord by imitating the one who offended you. Vengeance and moral corruption are self-destructive strategies. Believers must remember that sexual purity is not contingent upon the behavior of our spouse, but because of our love for, and commitment to, Jesus Christ. Honoring God and His Word should be our primary motivation for remaining morally pure.

Even "beautiful" people are cheated on by their partners. As a relationship expert accurately stated, "Partners cheat due to their own problems—anger, boredom, jealousy, sexual addiction—not due to something lacking in the women [or men]." Both victim and victimizer must learn a valuable lesson from Scripture: Even though David realized he had tragically wronged several people, he knew his supreme sin was against God—to whom he *will* answer. That is why he said during his prayer of repentance recorded in Psalm 51:4, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." Sexual immorality is ultimately between that person and the Lord.

Adulterers and molesters are pathetic, pitiful people who *will* eventually pay for their offenses. All of us are desperate sinners in need of the Savior's mercy and forgiveness. We cannot expect the Lord to forgive our sins against Him if we do not forgive those who hurt and wrong us (Matthew 6:14-15; Colossians 3:13). Victims who are believers in Christ must not allow bitterness or personal revenge to consume their lives. Instead, they must release their humiliation and pain to the Lord and trust Him to bring good out of every circumstance (Romans 8:28).

Rather than turn to alcohol, drugs, or other vices, a victim must take back control of her or his life with the Lord's help. Exercising, eating healthy, and becoming active in beneficial and fulfilling pursuits, such as helping others, is great therapy. The apostle Paul's advice to forget those things behind us and press on toward the goal of our calling in Christ Jesus is crucial. One couple who discovered each other's unfaithfulness chose the path of forgiveness, but resolved never to tolerate such behavior in either of them again. A blessed marriage resulted as the previously unfaithful spouses were motivated to never stray again.

Victims of sexual abuse or unfaithfulness who can identify with the suffering of Jesus Christ will find comfort and hope. This serves to direct the victim's attention off of self and onto Jesus, and the greater picture... Scripture indicates that in this life believers will face trials and tragedies. The experiences of our hurts and pain help us to "participate in the sufferings of Christ" (1 Peter 4:12-16). Our personal suffering in this life gives us a glimpse of Christ's incomprehensible suffering for the sins of the world and helps us appreciate His sacrificial love and marvelous grace. It also refines us and helps conform us into His likeness (Romans 8:29).

I have, over the years, observed many victims of unfaithfulness having their pain and humiliation replaced with pity and mercy. They become the caregiver, later in life, for the unfaithful partner whose choices and lifestyle led to the adverse consequences Scripture warned about. Most encouraging is the believers assurance that one day memories of all past failures, hurts, and humiliations will be forever removed. The blessings and glory we ultimately receive will

far surpass anything we might suffer or endure in this life (Romans 8:18).

11

Even Heroes Suffer Consequences

David and Solomon provide crucial lessons for us—as pertinent as they were three millennia ago. David was a man after God's own heart. He desired to obey the Lord's commandments and honor Him. Yet, David had a serious character weakness—a lust for women. We all are aware of David's grievous transgression when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband put to death. We also know that God sent Nathan the prophet to rebuke David and to pronounce judgment against him. In Psalm 51 we read about David's sincere repentance. You can almost feel David's emotions through the verses of this psalm. God forgave and restored David, but there were some tragic consequences, as there will be in the lives and families of those who do not learn from David's failure.

New Year's Eve in Rome

Consequences of sin often occur swiftly and unexpectedly, as happened to me while on a ministry trip in Rome one New Year's Eve. My son and another seminary student went with me to the Forum, where they were having a massive gathering. We wanted to see how the Romans celebrate New Year's Eve, so about 10:00 p.m. we started on a 30-minute walk from our hotel. Firecrackers were thrown throughout the night—many landing at people's feet as they passed by.

As we walked through a park, a bottle rocket was shot into the trees overhead. Suddenly, we heard a thunderous sound! It was the flapping wings of thousands of large black birds taking off from the branches in a panic. The sky overhead turned equally black from the

mass of birds blocking out the light from the moon and the stars. It suddenly occurred to me what thousands of panicked birds do, so I told those with me to run for cover. Before we could get to shelter we were bombarded by bird droppings. We quickly threw our coat hoods up as we ran to nearby shelter—the unwilling targets of many "hits" on the way!

Messing with illicit sex is like shooting a bottle rocket into trees loaded with thousands of birds. Panic will ensue as you are pelted with the consequences. You may think you are getting away with sexual sin when suddenly the peaceful calm unexpectedly erupts into chaos. Eventually, as the Bible says, we reap what we sow as our sins are exposed.

One or more of the following consequences can pelt you like bird droppings:

- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Pregnancy (with options of abortion, adoption, or keeping the baby)
- Guilt, shame, disgust
- Fear (of getting caught, STDs, or pregnant)
- Terror and tears (when you do get caught)
- Struggle with immoral thoughts and lustful memories and the regrets of past escapades for the rest of your life
- Ensnared in deception and lies
- Loss of trust and intimacy (hard for partner to give themself totally to someone they do not trust)
- Loss of happiness, peace, and joy
- Stress
- Premature aging
- Wasted time and potential
- Emotional and spiritual problems
- Tarnished testimony

- Dishonoring the Lord and bringing reproach on His name
- Damaged or ruined marriages
- Devastated children

A friend I had not seen for many years told me why he believed in God: He explained that he had done everything the Bible told him not to do, and suffered all the consequences. He knew there must be a God to inspire such an accurate Book.

Do you remember the female prisoner we read about previously? How about all the tragic stories? Countless lives—both male and female, young and old—have been marred or ruined by ignoring God's warnings concerning promiscuity and sexual immorality.

Overwhelmed By Circumstances

David's failure to control his desire for women caused much suffering for him and his family. After David's adultery with Bathsheba, one calamity after another followed. He suffered violence, strife, and sorrow the remaining 25 years of his life: David's reputation was forever tarnished. David's illegitimate baby died. One of his sons, Amnon, raped his half-sister, Tamar. (Although David was king, he probably felt powerless to deal with Amnon because of his own previous sin with Bathsheba.) Another son of David, Absalom, killed Amnon for raping his sister. Absalom later led a rebellion against David, forcing David to flee Jerusalem, then lay with his father's concubines in broad daylight in the sight of all Israel. Then this rebellious son was put to death against David's wishes. Even as David lay dying, another son, Adonijah, tried to set himself up as king although Solomon was the appointed one. Adonijah was later executed by Solomon.

These tragedies all stemmed from that time when David disobeyed the Lord and sinned with Bathsheba. Learn a lesson from David. Do not allow the enticement of sin or the pleasures of this world to turn you away from pure devotion to Christ. Only the fool thinks he can play with fire and not get burned. Eventually consequences will overtake you as unexpectedly and as swiftly as those birds overtook us in Rome.

Advising Solomon

Near the end of his life, David wisely admonished his son:

> And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever (1 Chronicles 28:9).

He also counseled:

> I am about to go the way of all the earth, so be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways…so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go (1 Kings 2:2-3).

Solomon began his reign by heeding his father's advice. He honored the Lord and obeyed His commands. The Lord gave Solomon great wisdom, enabled him to build the Temple in Jerusalem, and inspired him to write many proverbs. However, something went wrong: We see that the end of Solomon's life was not as glorious as the beginning. What happened?

Like David, Solomon lusted for women. Scripture reveals that Solomon loved many foreign women. He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. Solomon took wives from nations which God had forbidden the Israelites to intermarry with because God knew they would turn the hearts of His people after their gods. When Solomon became king, he was admonished to obey the Lord's commands. As king he was instructed to read the Law all the days of his life to ensure that he carefully followed the words of the Lord. Solomon knew the Law and initially read it often. He was aware that God prohibited marriage to pagan wives, that his heart would not be led astray. He knew that God would not tolerate idolatry.

Looking back, we may wonder how the wisest man in the world could become so foolish. I am sure Solomon began to read less and less the commands of the Law—if at all. Instead of trusting the Lord, Solomon made alliances with the nations around him. He married

many foreign women who led him astray. Just like many today, Solomon did not heed God's warnings: He allowed lust and compromise to erode his commitment to the God of the Bible.

As Solomon became influenced by his wives, a transition happened. Instead of wholeheartedly serving the Lord, Solomon tolerated the idolatry of his foreign wives. He even built high places for them to burn incense and offer sacrifices to their gods. Solomon's heart was turned toward their gods and he participated in their immoral and idolatrous rituals—setting a devastating pattern for Israel's future kings for generations to come.

The prophet Nehemiah comments:

> Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women (Nehemiah 13:26).

Spiritual Adultery

Sexual immorality often results in spiritual adultery—as it did in Solomon's case. First Kings chapter 11:1-14 gives a summary of this sad scenario:

> King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women…. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love…and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for

> Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.
>
> The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD's command. So the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen." Then the LORD raised up against Solomon an adversary….

Solomon's lust for women led to his downfall. If only he and his father David would have heeded God's Word given through Moses hundreds of years earlier, their tragic consequences could have been avoided.

Seduced

When Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, Balak, king of Moab, wanted Balaam to curse Israel. However, God would not allow this. So what did Balaam tell Balak to do? He told him to entice Israel into sexual immorality and idolatry to turn the hand of the Lord against them (Numbers 31:16). As a result, the Moabites caused many Israelites to sin against the Lord by seducing them into spiritual harlotry through the sensual worship of their gods.

Numbers 25:1-3 (NASB) states:

> While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the

> people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel.

Persuaded by the Moabite women, the Israelite men participated in the sexual rituals of Baal worship and bowed before and offered sacrifice to their gods. Soon God meted out a terrible judgment for Israel's disobedience and rebellion. No wonder then, when the apostles and elders held a council in Jerusalem to determine what should be required of the new Gentile converts, they advised them to abstain from food sacrificed to idols and from sexual immorality (Acts 15:20). Idolatry and sexual immorality, more than anything else recorded in Scripture, have caused God's people to fall. In His rebuke of the Church in Pergamum near the end of the first century AD, the resurrected and glorified Christ said:

> I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality (Revelation 2:14).

What do you think Christ is saying to the Church today? Repent of your sexual immorality and idolatry before judgment comes.

Despising the Lord

When David sinned with Bathsheba, Nathan said to him, "Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes?" (2 Samuel 12:9). "Despise" (Hebrew *bazah*) means to treat contemptuously, to scorn, to make of little account. We despise God's Word and dishonor Him when we live a lifestyle or participate in practices contrary to His will.

Essentially, what does every married person want in a relationship? Faithfulness! God desires the same in our relationship with Him. His love and faithfulness should compel us to faithfulness. We should be grieved when He is dishonored or any reproach is brought upon His name.

The Final Lesson

Although Solomon had tremendous wealth, power, wisdom and many beautiful women, he was not satisfied. The last few verses of Ecclesiastes sum up what Solomon finally learned the hard way:

> Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Both Sides

I discovered the same dead-end reality as Solomon. Before I knew the Lord, and in my foolishness, I tried almost everything imaginable; but true and lasting peace and fulfillment eluded me. The only solution to my dilemma was in giving my life to Jesus Christ. I know both sides of life—from being totally out of control in nearly every area of my life, to bringing every aspect of my life under control with the Lord's help. He is a merciful, loving and forgiving God who not only set me free, but brought about tremendous transformation.

Navy Seal Set Free

While ministering at a men's retreat, I met a Chief Instructor for Navy Seals and Marines, who was also a deacon and men's leader at church. Following my first message he asked to see my notes on the four things I mentioned that people will not repent of during the Tribulation. After reading the Scriptures to him, he looked at me and said, "I am guilty of all four." Methodically, he continued: "I am a liar and a thief because I steal from work; I am proud and therefore an idolater; I am a murderer because I kill people with my words; I am sexually immoral because I am in a four-year affair that no one knows about except me, her, the Lord, and now you."

After telling me he was a Christian, married with three children, I read Ephesians 5:1-13 to him, then asked, "If you were forced to watch your daughter being raped and tortured, would you still want

to have sex with this other woman?" He shook his head, no. I said, "It would never even enter your mind. You see, it is all perspective." I suggested that unless he repented, these sins would consume him like a cancer. His immoral sexual relationship would destroy him physically, mentally and spiritually; would destroy his marriage and hurt his children. "It is eating me up," he said as he showed me a rash on his arm. "I have to get rid of this anguish I am under." He dropped to his knees and repented.

After we prayed he told me that the reason God changed my schedule to speak at the men's retreat this weekend, instead of ministering in Germany on U.S. military bases as previously planned, was so he could hear me; that otherwise, he would have never dealt with these issues in his life. The next day, following my closing message as I was preparing to leave, he came up to me and said that he was finally free.

I wish I could say that all went well with him and his wife. Although he ended his relationship with the other woman, his unfaithfulness triggered tremendous fallout in his marriage and family that surpassed any rigors he faced in becoming a Navy Seal. Nevertheless, the Lord has forgiven him and he learned the wisdom of obeying Scripture and seeking to be a true "warrior for Christ." A lesson to all of us is that all the strength, discipline and determination of even a Navy Seal is insufficient to resist sexual temptation. We must be motivated to obey God's Word and rely on the Lord to strengthen us in our weakness. This battle is too strong to win without His help.

"More Than These?"

Three times Peter denied knowing the Lord, while Jesus was being interrogated before the High Priest. Then Peter ran away, abandoned Him and wept bitterly. Several days after the crucifixion, the resurrected Christ was having breakfast with His disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He asked Peter a probing question, "Do you truly love me more than these?" (John 21:15). His question to Peter did not pertain to a sexual failure. But how would you answer

a similar question if the Lord asked you, “Do you truly love Me more than pornography and immoral sexual relationships?”

I hope you would be able to respond with the same words and conviction of Peter, “Yes Lord, You know I do.” Then, like Peter, live out your life “in” that conviction. Sometimes that means that day after day and night after night, we shut down thoughts and behaviors that would cause us to deny or abandon our Lord.

12

God's Perspective

Playboy

Asked by *The New York Times* of what he was proudest, *Playboy* magazine founder Hugh Hefner responded:

> That I changed attitudes toward sex. That nice people can live together now. That I decontaminated the notion of premarital sex. That gives me great satisfaction.

Upon his death, Hugh was praised by many for liberating his generation from sexual limitations. However, the Bible has a different perspective: Hugh may have had a "funtastic" life, but I would not want his eternity. He may have been proud about breaking down moral barriers and mocking God's commands, but I am certain he is now humbled before the One who allowed him the freedom to make his own choices and even live his sensual lifestyle—which influenced multitudes of adults and youth. Jesus said:

> Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied round his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin (Luke 17:1-2).

This well-known man may have boasted about "decontaminating the notion of premarital sex" (what the Bible forbids as fornication), but I wonder, now that he has a "perspective from eternity," how does he feel about all the STDs, adultery, ruined marriages, broken homes, shattered lives, exploited women, rape, abuse, abortions...he helped unleash on the U.S. and the world.

Instead of encouraging lust and promoting pornography, Hugh would have been much better off being more like righteous Job (Job

31:1) and repentant David (Psalm 51; 101:3). He may have temporarily enjoyed sex with over a thousand women and the opulence of a multimillionaire, but how is he faring in the hereafter? Having despised God's mercy and rejected His salvation, it would be "a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31, NASB).

Advice from the Creator

If there is a God—and I am convinced there is—then we need to live according to His guidelines and requirements. We were created in God's image and He *wants* what is best for us. As our Creator, He *knows* what is best for us. We must strive to adhere to His standards and abide within His boundaries. Following His advice safeguards us from suffering needless immediate, long-term, and eternal consequences.

In *Answers* magazine Dr. Owen Strachan states:

> Through the fall of Adam and Eve, we not only became sinful, we sought to displace God as our rightful ruler. Now, we naturally seek different leaders than the divine.... Hollywood celebrities who sell us whitewashed images and perfectly sculpted bodies. For a populace that idolizes self and taps into mishmash spirituality, enlightened entertainers offer an alternate path to wholeness (until the smoking wreckage of their personal lives reveals the emptiness of their words).

It is far wiser to trust the words of the Creator as recorded in Scripture than those of an amoral society as reported through the media. It is far better to entrust your eternal destiny to the One who sacrificed His life for you than to those who are consumed by self gratification and lust. Instead of following in the footsteps of someone who will lead you down a path of eventual disease, divorce, devastation and death, follow the One who promises abundant life here and now, and true and lasting righteousness, peace, and joy!

The Holy Bible speaks in timely fashion concerning the full spectrum of sexuality. Let us examine more of what Scripture has to say:

Strong warning is given in 2 Peter 2:2-19 concerning false teachers who live in immorality:

> Many follow their shameful ways and bring the way of truth into disrepute. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning. They seduce the unstable by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature. They promise freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.

The flirtations of an immoral woman may entice, but keep Solomon's warning in mind:

> Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished. A man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away (Proverbs 6:25-33).

Proverbs chapter 7 provides a crucial caution concerning the seductive power of the adulteress:

> My son, keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on your heart. They will keep you from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words.
>
> I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house at twilight, as the dark of night set in.

> Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent. She took hold of him and kissed him and said: "I looked for you and have found you! I have covered my bed with colored linens. Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love! My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey."
>
> With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life.
>
> Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say. Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths. Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death.

No wonder in Ecclesiastes 7:26 Solomon wrote:

> I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.

We learned from the previous chapter that Solomon did not follow his own advice and suffered dire consequences. Solomon is an example of the dilemma of life: knowing what to do but not doing it. And let me also emphasize that the warnings in Scripture are relevant for both sexes. One gender does not have a monopoly on sinful or seductive behaviors.

The apostle Paul admonishes us in 1 Corinthians 6:18:

> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

Hebrews 13:4 clearly states:

> Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the

sexually immoral.

Revelation 2:20-22 was written to a first century church in Thyatira, but is a warning to all believers:

> I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality…. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways.

The original Jezebel (in the Old Testament) is not known to have committed any sexual sins. Her distinguishing sins were witchcraft and promoting false gods. But by identifying this woman in Thyatira with the wicked Jezebel of the Old Testament, the Lord is making a close link between sexual sin and idolatry.

Ephesians 5:3-5 makes it crystal clear:

> But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking…. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Unlawful Sexual Relations

The Law given to Moses discloses various aspects of sexual activity that God forbids. An overview follows:

> No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. Do not have sexual relations with your mother. Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife. Do not have sexual relations with your sister…. Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter.
>
> Do not have sexual relations with your father's sister. Do not

> have sexual relations with your mother's sister. Do not dishonor your father's brother by approaching his wife to have sexual relations; she is your aunt. Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife.
>
> Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. Do not have sexual relations with either her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter; they are her close relatives. That is wickedness. Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living. Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during the uncleanness of her monthly period. Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her.
>
> Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.
>
> Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 18:6-30).

Almost 2,000 years ago the apostle Paul wrote these strong words to the Church at Rome:

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made,

> so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.
>
> Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is for ever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worth while to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.... Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:18-32).

I was training a California man who was to accompany me to Haiti later that month. It was close to midnight when we were standing outside a gay bar conversing with a young man who proclaimed, "I am gay and an atheist!" I replied, "I am not concerned about your sexual preference." The young man's response was "Wow! You are the first religious person to make that comment." I said, "First, I want you to come to know the Creator. Look into the sky and consider that there are billions of stars in billions of galaxies. Also consider your DNA and you can begin to realize how complex the universe and our bodies are. This did not happen by random chance. An intelligent Designer created us." I continued, "God says in the

Bible that if you search for Me with all your heart, you will find Me. My main concern is to challenge you to search for the evidence of the God who created you. Coming to know Him will lead you to Jesus Christ. Then, by His Word and Spirit, He will deal with the other issues in your life." As we parted he seemed touched and appreciative of what and how I shared.

Honor God with Your Body

Scriptures reflecting the call to honor the Lord with our bodies and live godly lives are plentiful; here are just a few.

1 Corinthians 6:13-20:

> …The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord…. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!…Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

Romans 13:13-14:

> Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

2 Peter 3:11-12:

> …You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming….

1 John 3:2-3:

> Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just

as he is pure.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7:

> It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Sexual Immorality Defined

Insightful comments on Hebrews 13:4 from *The Full Life Study Bible*:

> Biblical terms used for sexual immorality, describing the breadth of its evil, are as follows: sexual immorality (Greek *porneia*) describes a wide variety of sexual activities before or outside of marriage; it is not limited to consummated sexual acts. Any intimate sexual activity or play outside the marriage relationship, including the touching of the intimate parts of the body or seeing another person's nakedness, is included in this term and is clearly a transgression of God's moral standards for His people (1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3).
>
> Debauchery, or sensuality, (Greek *aselgeia*) denotes the absence of clear moral principles, especially disregard of sexual self-control that maintains pure behavior. It includes the inclination toward indulging in or arousing sinful lust, and thus is a participation in biblically unjustifiable conduct (Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 4:19; 1 Peter 4:3; 2 Peter 2:2,18).
>
> Exploiting or taking advantage of someone (Greek *pleonekteo*) means to deprive another of the moral purity

that God desires for that person in order to satisfy one's own self-centered desires. To arouse in another person sexual desires that cannot be righteously fulfilled is to exploit or take advantage of that person.

Lust (Greek *epithumia*) is having an immoral desire that one would fulfill if the opportunity arose (Ephesians 4:19,22; 1 Peter 4:3; 2 Peter 2:18).

According to neverthirsty.org, "The Greek word *porneia* is a sin that includes a wide range of illicit sexual intercourse or sexual activity. The word can refer to prostitution, sexual intercourse outside of marriage, pedophilia, homosexuality, lesbianism, incest, premarital sex and bestiality."

Living By Whose Standards?

I was having a conversation with *Joe* at his place of employment one day. A coworker blurted out that Joe was living with one woman but also had several girlfriends in other cities. I told him about a voodoo witch doctor I knew who had women in many different areas of Haiti with several children by them. Later, when he became a believer in Jesus Christ, I counseled the former witch doctor to choose only one of the girlfriends as his wife, but support the others financially.

Joe said that he could never do that because his family has always lived this way. I informed him that God's standard was to marry one woman and be faithful to her. He repeated that his family has always lived the other way and he could not change. I asked, "If you let a buddy of yours move into your house, could he do whatever he wants or would he have to obey your rules? What would you do if he messed with your woman or trashed your place?" Joe emphatically said that his buddy would have to live by his rules and standards or he would throw him out!

"Your own words will be your judge" I quickly responded, "because God created this world and everything and everyone in it. He gave us standards to live by and we will one day stand before Him and give an account. He will say to you that just as you required

those who live in your house to honor your standards, so God expects you to honor His." He looked at me and the other man who was listening and said, "I am speechless! I am speechless!" I think that was the first time he was ever speechless. I hope the day comes when he gives his life to Christ, and will be found living by God's standards, and not his own.

When a person comes to Christ, God changes the inner man through the Holy Spirit, and one's lifestyle begins to conform to God's will and standards. This is something only God can do.

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Beauty of Marital Sex

Marital sex involves physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Its dynamics are complex and exciting—too challenging for those who settle for less. Illicit sex is usually superficial. In spite of unlimited postures and techniques, it is limited to a shallow physical level.

Making love is not just the consummation of a physical act but the compilation of many factors. Faith, love, trust, and commitment are crucial concepts in a marital relationship. What happens throughout the day such as holding hands, walking in the park together, sharing each others trials and joys, speaking kind words instead of nasty or degrading comments, also contributes to the physical, emotional, and spiritual pleasure of marital sex.

Do Not Deprive Your Mate

As we conclude this chapter on God's perspective, let me mention that spouses who purposely deprive their mates of sexual satisfaction and fulfillment are also violating clear scriptural mandates. First Corinthians 7:3-5 states:

> The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual

> consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

God's Intended Design

God did not design male and female for the distorted reality we see today. Rather than using women merely for pleasure or abusing them, men should be their protectors. Rather than enticing and coercing men by offering sexual favors, women should maintain their dignity and purity.

Husbands must not demand or force submission by their wives, but should selflessly and sacrificially give of themselves for them. Husbands should treat their wives as precious, delicate jewels, entrusted to their care.

Wives should not manipulate and control their husbands, striving to be the head of the house, but willingly and lovingly submit as to the Lord. Women were not created to be "hurt mates" who undermine and oppose what the Lord wants to do through their husbands, but "help mates" who support and encourage them. The Lord intends for a man to unconditionally love and protect his wife, and for a wife to be a loyal companion and helpmate—both remaining faithful to the Lord and each other. Scripture has a clear and emphatic message for both wives and husbands:

> Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. However, each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (Ephesians 5:22-25, 33).

We cannot deny the obvious teaching of Scripture nor the inherent wisdom and blessings when both husband and wife submit to the Lord and honor Him with their lives and marriage.

13

Steps to Overcoming Sexual Immorality

While speaking in Trinidad in the West Indies, I visited their main tourist attraction: a large lake of tar. It is said to be the largest natural pitch deposit in the world. (Pitch is a black, sticky substance formed in the distillation of coal tar.) The guide there offered us a free walk out onto the tar. We were assured he would carefully lead us so that we would not fall in. I had been warned by my host beforehand, however, that once someone ventures out with him and is ready to come back he says, "That will be twenty dollars." He always gets his price because only he knows where it is safe to step so you do not fall into the tar pit. It is the same way with sexual immorality—easy to get into, but difficult to get out, and there is always a price to pay.

A High Price to Pay

I warned a pastor who was ensnared in a sexual affair that if continued, he would pay a heavy price. It would cost him his health, emotional stability, spiritual life, finances, and family. That other person may seem fun for the moment, but she is not worth your wife and your life. I told him he needed the fear of God, that if he even had a *glimpse* of the holiness and awesomeness of God, he would be gripped by such fear and reverence that he would get on his knees and cry out in repentance. Eventually he did. Today, by the grace of God, he is a restored man.

Forgiveness Is Available

Many have made mistakes regarding sexual behavior, but no matter what you have thought or done, there is hope. Jesus said to

the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11). Knowing believers make mistakes, the apostle John wrote:

> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

In the Aftermath

The correct response to sexual sin, or any sin for that matter, is to confess it to the Lord and receive His forgiveness. True repentance means to turn away from it and be willing to accept any adverse consequences without bitterness or rebellion. Having a mentor and one or more accountability partners is crucial. Also, attending a biblically sound church where you can be discipled and which provides Christian fellowship with godly men and women, is crucial

Distressed in Spirit

A Christian man in his thirties once said to me, "It is impossible to escape the corruption of this world." I responded, "You can be distressed by it like Lot who lived in degenerate Sodom." We read he was:

> …a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard (2 Peter 2:7-8).

The Lord can change our hearts and perspectives so that instead of finding pleasure in scenes of immorality via television, movies, cell phones, or displayed in pornographic literature and web sites, we will be distressed in spirit.

When we see immorality through the eyes of our Creator and comprehend the evil and destruction it unleashes against our spouse, children, ourselves, and society, the perversions being spewed out of immoral cesspools should disgust us—not entertain us. Ask the Lord to help you look at immorality through His eyes. Ask

Him to give you a revulsion for illicit sex and show you the beauty of marital sex.

Flee from Lust

Every day we face temptations: opportunities to either inflame or suppress our lusts. The choices we make will either enslave or liberate us. Wisdom admonishes us to follow the advice of 2 Timothy 2:22: "Flee youthful lusts." Before the situation gets out of control—STOP! Think about the consequences and how foolish it would be to continue. Learn to say NO! When a guy or girl pressures you to have sex or compromise your beliefs, just say, "No! It violates my convictions. Besides, it is not safe, wise, loving, or fulfilling. I will not risk the consequences. I will wait until marriage."

Titus 2:11-14 states:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Today, fleeing youthful lusts also means avoiding the immoral lure of certain movies, music, magazines, and websites, as well as some people. Depend on the Spirit of God to give you the wisdom and self-control to resist temptation and to flee the scene if necessary—like Joseph, who escaped the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife:

> Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he refused…"My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the

household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house (Genesis 39:6-12).

That's as Far as I Go

If you see an attractive person and your mind begins to take you in a direction it should not, or if certain sights, sounds, smells, and circumstances unexpectedly transport you back to bad memories and habits, stop and say to yourself something like, "No! That's not what I want. This is as far as I go. I choose You, Lord." Instead of being *entertained* by lewd conduct and allowing it to enter your heart; or before overstepping verbal, emotional, or physical boundaries, leading to an immoral relationship, stop and say something like, "No! It is not going to happen. That leads to death. It will destroy me. I choose You, Lord."

It is amazing how our thoughts and emotions respond to assertive affirmation. These types of reinforcements will greatly strengthen your resolve to not fall into old ruts and patterns, but to keep your thoughts and behavior pure before the Lord. Someone wisely said, "Lord, when I have the desire, take away the opportunity. And when I have the opportunity, take away the desire."

Guard Your Life

Many Christians justify sexual activity before marriage by reasoning that they plan to get married. However, this thinking makes them more vulnerable to unfaithfulness. When temptation arises, those who were conditioned to receive instant gratification are more likely to have extramarital affairs. By contrast, self-control, at this juncture in their relationship, makes them more inclined to show self-restraint if confronted by someone else's efforts to seduce them. Exercising self-discipline over sexual desires with each other helps affair-proof their marriage.

I have conducted many self defense clinics in schools and for various groups where I demonstrate how to avoid potential confrontations and how to deal with attack situations. "The most important principle," I tell the students, "is to use wisdom in avoiding

places, people, and situations where you know a confrontation or an attack is likely to occur." Likewise, to overcome sexual immorality, you must avoid places, people, and situations that may lead you into temptation and entice you to lust and into immorality. Avoid compromising circumstances conducive to leading you where you don't want to go! Take steps to guard your life and your home by removing or limiting television, installing filter programs on computers, and destroying all pornography by discarding any inappropriate magazines, movies, hard drives, etc.

Lee Grady provides practical wisdom in an article in the *afaJournal*:

> Easu sold his birthright for a bowl of soup, and many men [and women] today forfeit their relationship with God by compromising with porn. You can't break free from sexual sin by slowly backing away from it or taming it like a pet. You must lay the axe to the root of your problem. Cut off all access to porn. Slam the door in its face. And if you can't stop looking at porn on your phone or computer, get rid of your phone and computer.

Avoid setting yourself up for temptation. Randomly surfing the internet, flicking through television channels, or browsing sensual material at a book store will likely flash enticing visuals before your eyes that can lead to another defeat if you are not wise in escaping them and strong in overcoming them. Being alone in your bedroom or the back seat of a car in a remote area with someone to whom you are physically attracted is like playing Russian roulette. Sooner or later the gun will fire. No matter how pure your intentions, you are setting yourself up for defeat by violating the biblical mandate: "Flee youthful lusts!"

First Thessalonians 5:22 (KJV) admonishes us to "abstain from all appearance of evil."

Setting Myself Up For Defeat

As a new Christian I used to think, "Lord, I am going to put myself in the midst of every temptation so I can prove how powerful

You are in enabling me to overcome them." And wondered why I was often being defeated. The Lord made me mindful of when the children of Israel entered and conquered the promised land. God told them to destroy all the idols and high places—and often—either to kill all the inhabitants or to drive them out (Exodus 34:11-13; Deuteronomy 7:1-5).

At first I thought this was cruel. I thought it revealed a weakness in Him; that He was unable to preserve His people in the midst of temptation. But sin is deceitful and mankind loves to make up excuses to justify it. The Lord knows the attraction of lust and sin. He gives us wisdom to avoid temptation before it ensnares, enslaves or destroys us—just as it did to the Israelites on numerous occasions when they violated His commands.

Jesus knows how important it is to remove our source of temptation. He said:

> If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell (Matthew 18:8-9).

Jesus does not mean for us to do this literally. If that were so, the disciples and New Testament believers would all have been maimed and crippled! Rather, He was emphasizing the importance of using wisdom in removing and avoiding sources of temptation and sin.

Stand persistently on 1 Corinthians 10:13, which promises:

> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

However, do not purposely place yourself in a tempting situation and expect this principle to rescue you. This is *tempting the Lord*

and flirting with disaster. On the other hand, if you do sin, go quickly before the Lord, our great High Priest, and confess your sin. Hebrews 4:14-16 will be a comfort and encouragement:

> …since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Advance Determination

During defense clinics, I told the female students they must determine in advance whether they would submit to rape or risk their life resisting. I warned them once the emotions of an attack situation occur, they would not have time to think through their options rationally, but would probably react in panic unless they had a predetermined response. So, too, we must determine in advance what we will or will not do concerning sexual activity. If you do not do so, and you find yourself in a compromising situation such as walking past a porn shop, or alone with an attractive and available person as music plays softly in the background, creating the perfect atmosphere, you will be defeated. Sensual emotions under these kinds of circumstances are incredibly strong. However, if in advance, you have determined in your heart concerning what you will *not* do, and made a commitment to the Lord by setting limits regarding what you *will* do, then you have a much better chance to resist temptation.

Realize, a temptation to sin can also, through resistance, be a test and an opportunity to prove your obedience to the Lord and make you a more effective witness. Not that you should be hunting for tests; they will find you in some of the most unexpected ways and places. What a great emotional feeling it is to walk away from temptation! The sense of victory will prove far better than if you had

given in. Each conquest over sexual sin makes you stronger and creates the exhilarating sense of being free.

A Lesson from Seminary Graduates

While working on his master's degree at Talbot Theological Seminary, my son BJ, learned some helpful insights through a chapel service to help believers guard themselves from sexual temptation. His summation:

> A study based on 200 male seminary graduates who had fallen prey to sexual immorality revealed there were four traits missing in the lives of these men:
>
> First, these men did not spend personal time with God. They lacked an intimate prayer and devotional life. Perhaps, because of the demands of their ministry, they felt they simply did not have time to pray and study God's Word. However, we must meditate daily upon God's Word (Joshua 1:8; Matthew 4:4) and live a life of continual prayer (Colossians 4:2). These "holy habits" were a trademark of Jesus' ministry on earth (Matthew 14:23; 26:36-44; Mark 6:46; 14:32; Luke 6:12; 9:28).
>
> Second, these men had no personal accountability. The Christian life is not to be spent in isolation, but lived out within the community of other believers. Every Christian needs the encouragement and edification of other believers. We all need at least one person who loves us enough to encourage us when we are feeling discouraged and to correct us when we are living in opposition to the standards of God's Word. Seek to fellowship with mature Christians whom you can trust and who will provide you with prayer support, encouragement, accountability, and wise counsel.
>
> Third, 90 percent of these men got involved in sexual promiscuity by counseling women. In order to avoid becoming emotionally and/or sexually involved with someone we are helping, men must not be alone with

women. Paul told Titus it is the duty of older women to instruct/encourage younger women (Titus 2:3-5). Believers should stay away from inappropriate situations (being alone, "friendly" flirtation, coarse joking, etc.). We should conduct ourselves in a manner reflective of God's holiness as we follow the examples of Joseph (Genesis 39:6-12) and Job (Job 31:1) to flee situations and avoid thoughts that may compromise us.

Fourth, these men had the attitude that they were immune or "too spiritual" to fall prey to the deceptions and lure of sexual immorality. May we never think we are invulnerable to the temptations of sexual compromise. Instead, may we humbly walk daily in the grace of God as we seek to live a life which reflects His holiness. Rather than being like those who seek after the pleasures and lusts of the flesh, God commands His children to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace (2 Timothy 2:22).

My prayer is that believers will not be swept away by the promiscuity and perversions of our culture, but will stand firm on God's Word, living a life that is characterized by self-control and that is reflective of the holy character of God Almighty.

Discerning All Things

Entertainment does more than entertain. It conveys ideas, values, philosophies, and lifestyles. That is why it is imperative you evaluate television, movies, music, the internet, books, and magazines with a discerning mind and heart.

When you are exposed to lustful temptation, do not be a sponge: soaking it up and allowing it to enter your heart. Instead, be a filter and evaluate everything you watch, read, and listen to, by considering its immediate and long-term implications. Let what is not true and beneficial be like water rolling off the back of a duck. Do not let it take root in your heart. Say to yourself, "This visual

representation or message content is not truth and reality. It is not what I want. I choose to honor You, Lord."

Common Exposure

Whether you are at the beach, at work, watching television, listening to the news, using your computer, driving down the road, walking at the mall, or even sitting in a pew, there are constant sources of temptation. We are all exposed: Just checking e-mails or text messages can result in a host of unwanted sexual words and images. Billboards, advertisements, magazines, books, movies, music, the internet, and scantily clad people constantly stimulate the mind toward sexual thoughts and temptations. It is only by the grace of God anyone survives unscathed in this sex-obsessed society.

Everyone has sexual thoughts and temptations. What you do with those thoughts and temptations determines whether it is merely a "temptation to sin" or actual "adultery in your heart." In Matthew 15:19, Christ reveals sin begins in the heart. He states, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality…."

Lust Defined

The lust Jesus referred to is when you look with the attitude that, given the opportunity, you would participate with someone other than your spouse in such things as intimate conversation, hugging, kissing, looking upon their nakedness, or sexual contact of any kind. Once you fantasize that possibility in your mind and condone it in your heart, the actual fulfillment is just a step away. No wonder Jesus said if we have lust for someone in our hearts, we have already committed adultery with her or him. The line that separates giving in or not giving in is determined in our thought life and heart.

A married man once told me that as he was waiting in a doctor's office he noticed a beautiful woman. Instead of looking her up and down and letting his imagination run wild, he merely acknowledged her attractiveness, then turned his gaze forward and focused his thoughts elsewhere. Like seeing a 1968 Corvette in mint condition, instead of trying to steal it and take it home with him, he would

merely appreciate its design. So, too, if he sees an attractive woman, instead of lusting after her and trying to pick her up, he merely acknowledges the magnificence of the God who designed her.

Extended eye contact, flirtatious conversation and watching or reading sexually stimulating materials are sparks which ignite lust and passion, leading to a wildfire of sexual involvement. To avoid adultery in your heart and mind, do not look at anyone except your spouse in contemplation of having sexual intimacy.

The Road to Adultery

Purity involves more than just avoiding blatant stimulating images and situations. We must guard our hearts against even seemingly innocent flirtations. The road to adultery usually has preliminary stages. Recognizing and circumventing them early on can avert the slippery slope that leads to adultery. Something seemingly as innocent as a glance or wink of the eye can be all it takes to send a message of receptivity. An insightful article in the *Alliance of Biblical Pentecostals'* newsletter stated:

> For a believer to commit adultery, many other sins must first be committed without repentance. For instance, the initial lust in the heart for another that is not their spouse; the "innocent" conversations with the other person who initiated an impure relationship; the casual or "accidental" touches; the secret rendezvous for a cup of coffee. All these things are sins and the Holy Spirit would most assuredly convict the believer of such things immediately. But if the voice of the Spirit goes unheeded, the believer can progress further and further down a road of sin until the final, horrible act of adultery takes place.

Excerpts from the apostle Peter's comments in 2 Peter chapter 2 follow:

> But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies—bringing swift destruction on

> themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They revel in their pleasures. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable. They have left the straight way and wandered off. They mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.

Conquer or Be Conquered

Billions of dollars are spent on treating the victims of sexual abuse and other criminal activity through incarceration, behavior modification techniques, and medication. Instead of merely dealing with symptoms (removing the spider web), deal with the root cause (remove the spider which makes the web). Sexual abuse and sexual immorality are not just a "disease" that will eat you like a cancer; they are sin. They are contrary to God's intended purpose for His creation and need to be, as the apostle Paul says, "Crucified."

> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24).

For by what a person is overcome, by this he or she is enslaved. In other words, you are a slave to whatever controls you (2 Peter 2:19). If you do not overcome the sinful nature, be assured, it will overcome you. Control your flesh or it will control you. Be set free from your vices or be imprisoned by them. Conquer your weaknesses or they will conquer you. Prevail over your appetites or they will dominate you. I think you get my point: If you do not learn to exercise discipline and restraint regarding your behavior and lifestyle, you will be brought to ruin and hurt many others you touch through your life and example.

You Can Overcome

Do not allow yourself to be deceived into believing you cannot overcome sexual immorality. You can—and must. God always has a remnant who faithfully honor Him. Even during the Tribulation period, in the midst of the most vile and corrupt generation in human history, as unrepentant sexual immorality is rampant, there will be many who follow the Lord wholeheartedly. They will keep themselves pure and will not defile themselves with women (Revelation 14:4).

Instead of living a life of bondage by repeatedly carrying out the desires of the flesh, you can be an overcomer who walks in triumph through the Holy Spirit.

> Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:16).

To overcome and be set free from immoral thoughts and behavior you must be motivated to want to change. Repent and receive God's forgiveness and grace. Also realize, the path to freedom requires a total renewal of your mind by God's Word and through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. As you grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ, the fruit of the Spirit (including self-control) will develop in your life (Galatians 5:23).

Controlling Our Thoughts

It is obvious that sexual involvements first begin as thoughts in our minds and lust in our hearts. If we are going to overcome the sexual temptations we face in a sexually explicit and uninhibited society, we must control our thoughts and subsequent emotions. How we allow our minds to be programmed, will eventually manifest in our thoughts, emotions, words, and behavior. Thoughts produce emotions which in turn lead to words and actions. Behaviors formulate our lifestyle, which in turn, determines our destiny. If we fill our minds with garbage, we will develop a filthy thought life and corrupt lifestyle. It is inevitable and only a matter of time. What we watch, read, and listen to does affect us. Is it any wonder why so

many people manifest out-of-control language and behavior? Look at their mental diet.

The Lord has taught me that I must not tolerate certain thoughts. Thoughts of lust, worry, fear, jealousy, bitterness, and greed that come into my mind are intruders that will sap my strength, joy, and peace. They will enslave and destroy me. God says, "Resist them!" Fight against them as though you were fighting against an intruder in your house, attempting to kill your family. Develop the mental discipline to protect yourself and your family.

Those who want victory over sexual immorality would be wise to reflect upon—and implement—the following biblical principles:

2 Corinthians 10:5 encourages us to:

> Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Romans 12:2 says:

> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind….

Psalm 119:9, 11 asks and answers a relevant question:

> How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your Word. I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Philippians 4:8 tells us:

> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Descending to Immorality or Ascending to Victory

Seduction into immorality is often a five step process:

> 1. Think it. 2. Dwell on it. 3. Desire it. 4. Do it. 5. Pay for it.

Temptation starts as a thought or a glance. An idea enters your mind; if you do not dismiss it, but dwell on it, you will quickly find

yourself desiring it. As soon as the opportunity arises, you will fulfill it. What began as a mere thought, if left unchecked, can lead to devastating action.

Another set of steps I have discovered, leading to sexual immorality are:

- First—Looking. Not just looking and thinking, "That's an attractive person," but focusing on intimate parts of the body; lusting, fantasizing, and contemplating how to get it. Allowing the mind to linger on explicit details and dwelling on sexual fantasies will only feed the fire and lead to immoral sexual involvement.
- Second—Placing yourself in a situation where something is likely to happen.
- Third—Actual involvement in sexual immorality. James 1:14-15 (NASB) says it this way –

  But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Therefore, to be victorious in overcoming sexual immorality, take the following steps:

- First—Commit to the Lord that with His help you will not become involved in illicit sexual relationships and promiscuity. Now that you are a Christian whose body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, fornication and adultery are no longer an option.
- Second—Commit to the Lord that with His help, you will not purposely place yourself in a situation where you know something immoral is likely to happen. Nor will you look for someone to become a potential partner in immorality—or even flirt with that intent.
- Third—Commit to the Lord that with His help you will not look with lust in your heart. You will not focus on explicit details or fantasize. This includes pornography, sexually explicit movies and music, and other erotic materials. Why waste your time

> looking when you have already determined in your heart that nothing is going to happen?

Wandering Eyes

We must be more concerned about the condition of someone else's heart than the shape of their body. We must be more concerned about their eternal destiny than getting a glimpse of their anatomy. May God help us to look at a person through His eyes—someone for whom He died, not a sex object to be used for self-gratification.

No believer or Christian leader should have wandering eyes or stare in a lustful way. No good comes out of it. It is degrading to yourself, your spouse, and your Lord. God will eventually bring judgment on those "flirting with their eyes" (Isaiah 3:16-24).

My prayer is that when someone looks into my eyes, they do not see lust, but the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

Seeing the Real Person

A Christian woman living in New York City and seeking to live in purity before the Lord said to me, concerning all the smut-filled news stands: "I have learned to walk keeping my eyes down and looking straight ahead." I think we can all learn from her example.

Job said something similar: "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl" (Job 31:1). David asserted, "I will set before my eyes no vile thing" (Psalm 101:3).

Josh McDowell says it this way:

> When you see or meet a girl who brings lustful thoughts to mind, force yourself to look into her face and especially her eyes. This will help you to recognize and respond to the real person who is there and not just the body that person is living in.

Give the Lord Control

Our emotions and bodies may desire something, but we have a will. We can choose to surrender our will to the Lord and give Him control. One reason I fast, exercise, and eat nutritiously is to develop

discipline and self-control in every area of my life—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The apostle Paul said:

> All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered [or controlled] by anything (1 Corinthians 6:12, NASB).

As believers we have freedom in Christ. However, if something controls us, we are no longer free—but slaves to recurring habits and practices. I don't know about you, but I only want to be controlled by my Lord. I want to bring every aspect of my life under His control and walk in His wisdom, strength, and empowerment. The Lord has protected and spared my life so many times that I consider myself dead. Therefore, I have no right to pursue sinful desires, but only to seek His will and fulfill His purpose. Because of my commitment to Jesus Christ, I have the following reminder on my fasting list:

> You are my Lord—I have no will but to do Your will and no right but to do what is right in Your eyes.... Let me not contend with You or resist but submit and yield to You. Mold and make me into the man You want me to be.

Fruit of the Spirit

The choice is yours—you will either be controlled by the lust of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), *not* of will power. If you try to do it merely in your own strength and with self-effort, you will continue to be defeated and frustrated: You have already proven this to yourself. Instead, you need God's promised Helper (John 14:16). You must allow God's Spirit to bring your life under control. He will help you apply the biblical principles I have been sharing with you in this book. You will discover that the Lord is your Helper. You may not feel you deserve it, but you will not be able to deny it.

We draw closer to God when we read His Word and desire His Spirit to control our lives. As we choose to obey His Word, we are conformed increasingly into His likeness. The fruit of His Spirit is developed in our lives, and we are empowered to walk in victory.

Ask the Lord for Help

When I first started this ministry, the Lord spoke to my heart that He would greatly use and bless me if I remained faithful. He also warned that sexual immorality would destroy me if I let it get a foothold in my life. Because of this, whenever I spend time in fasting and prayer, I ask the Lord to burn any lust out of my life and help me by His Spirit to overcome it. I strive to live as one who will one day give an account to the Lord for my thoughts, words, and actions. No temporary affair or sexual addiction is worth my Lord, my family, my ministry, and my health.

Another excerpt from my prayer and fasting list reveals this desire to always live a pure life before the Lord:

> Forgive me and help me by Your Spirit to not tolerate but to overcome sexual immorality and lust. Help me never to forget how You have dealt with me or the consequences of David (son died, turmoil and tragedy in his life and family), Solomon (foreign wives turned his heart after other gods so that the Lord tore the kingdom out of his son's hand and raised up an adversary against Solomon), and Samson (lost his strength, eyes, freedom and his life). Also, help me never to forget what You have taught me: Not to look with lust—no good comes out of it. To look at everyone through Your eyes—someone for whom You died, not someone to be used for selfish gratification; to walk in obedience, discipline, and control; and to desire You more than anyone or anything else. Help me always to have a hunger and thirst and passion for You. Enable me to honor and glorify You with every aspect of my life.

When temptations arise, I remind myself I am not my own; I have been bought with a price. I have no will but to do His will and no right but to do what is right in His eyes. If you are in the jaws of temptation, fall on your knees—as many times as it takes—and cry out, "Lord, help me! Deliver me! Protect me! Strengthen me! Enable me to be victorious!" If you really mean it when you cry out to the Lord, He will provide a way of escape.

Only the Lord Satisfies

For years *Dale* had wanted to have a sexual encounter with *Sandy*. The night he read a preview of this book, he had that encounter—in his dreams. When he started getting what he thought he always wanted, he realized it was not what he really wanted, so he shut it down. The next morning he recalled the dream and felt a great victory was achieved. His perspective on that long desire to have an encounter with Sandy changed from an obsession for her to the realization that only the Lord can truly satisfy.

Many people's "highest calling" is to stay in shape and look good for the next sexual exploit. They do not get beyond this until the ravages of age, disease, or an injury take their toll and become irreversible. It is better to stay in shape to faithfully serve the Lord and present your body as a "living sacrifice" to Him. The main reason I exercise and eat healthy is to be a more effective witness and be able to continue the rigors of ministry and mission trips.

A married man who had been a womanizer all his life said to me, "I don't understand how you could give up women. You mean to tell me that if the most beautiful woman in the world stood before you and offered you anything, you would refuse it." I responded, "I would, because I have found something better." He continued, "I can give up anything but women." I responded, "I had every pleasure imaginable, but it did not satisfy me. When you come to have a relationship with the Lord like I do, you will give up anything else that undermines or hinders that relationship because nothing compares to knowing and living for Christ."

How fleeting are the things of this world! Knowing the Lord and walking in His presence and peace are more satisfying than pursuing any physical desire. My relationship with Jesus Christ is more important to me, and fulfills and satisfies me more than anyone or anything else; more than sex, pornography, or any other temporary, self-gratifying pleasure this world has to offer. All else is inferior to knowing Him. I never want to lose His presence in my life.

As a person who had all the pleasures this world had to offer as a youth, I can honestly say that nothing or no one has fulfilled my life

more than Jesus Christ. Living for Him has been an amazing adventure (filled with both blessings and challenges) as well as providing assurance of an eternal inheritance. Only Christ satisfied my constant search for meaning and purpose. The God who created and designed me has given me greater peace, joy, and hope than all the pleasures and riches this world has to offer.

As Moses rejected the riches of Egypt, I walked away from the fleeting pleasures of this world. Since coming to know Christ, I have never desired to return to my former lifestyle, but have forsaken all, for what I gained in Him. I now understand what the psalmist meant when he said, "Besides You, I desire nothing on earth" (Psalm 73:25, NASB), and "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God" (Psalm 42:1).

We serve such an incredible God and Creator that I cannot even begin to imagine what He has in store for His faithful servants. One thing is certain, we will be satisfied for all eternity in a universal paradise of God's amazing design which contains His manifest presence and blessings beyond the comprehension of mortal minds. David, the most beloved king in Israel's history, forgiven of a tainted past, confidently stated:

> You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forever (Psalm 16:11, NKJV).

With All Your Strength

When you "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30), you will limit or remove any influence—television, movies, the internet, and so on—which takes you away from Him. You will do your utmost to overcome any temptation that attempts to lure you from pure devotion to Him. Instead, you will desire to seek the Lord through prayer, fasting, and Scripture. As you do, you will notice a gradual fading of the lusts of the flesh. The temporary pleasures of this world will dim in comparison to knowing Christ. Seeking His will and living a life that honors the Lord will become your highest

priority. You will discover that all the good things you desired, hoped for, dreamed about, and longed for can, and one day will, be fulfilled in Him. Then you will be transformed into the person He designed you to be from the very beginning.

Until "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Revelation 11:15), be encouraged by the hope you have in Jesus Christ and rejoice in the freedom that is yours through Christ's unmerited grace and a life of commitment to Him.

14

A Storybook Romance

God is faithful and can make storybook romances come to fruition if we trust Him. Although His path is never easy, it is well worth the wait as He accomplishes His purpose. Below are the testimonies of my daughter, Tabitha, and Clayton as they fully commit themselves to the Lord.

Tabitha first met Clayton at a wedding rehearsal. It was during a ministry trip to San Diego in February, 1997, where I performed a wedding ceremony for my nephew Rich and his fiancee, Sunday. Rich's friend, Clayton, a California Highway Patrolman, was a groomsman in the wedding. There at the rehearsal, far from her home in Pennsylvania, Tabitha's and Clayton's eyes met, and a storybook romance began.

When God's Children Pray, He Answers

Little did anyone know at the time that Rich and Sunday, for three years prior to Tabitha's arrival, had been sharing God's Word with Clayton and praying he would totally commit his life to Christ. They had no idea that Tabitha, Rich's cousin, would be the answer to that prayer.

Clayton had been seeking for something more in his life. Although he made a commitment to Christ at the age of twelve and even read the Scriptures, he was unsettled. He was not content with just a form of religiosity. Upon meeting Tabitha, he suddenly realized what it was. Her vivacious faith and total commitment to the Lord drew him even closer to God. One day out of a deep longing for truth and guidance, he submitted to and recognized Christ as Lord of his life.

A Father's Insight

Three days after Tabitha met Clayton, I saw them talking to one another as they sat on the steps outside our hotel room. I remarked to my wife Karen, "They are going to get married."

Tabitha's Promise—Not As Easy As It Seemed

The year and a half prior to meeting Clayton was like living in a barren wasteland, in many respects, for Tabitha. It wasn't easy staying home night after night while her friends were dating and having "fun." Tabitha had promised the Lord and herself that she would not date until she found the man who would be her husband. So she spent many long, lonely nights waiting and praying, after turning down many opportunities to date. Like David of old, Tabitha believed God for the answer to her prayer:

> I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer (Psalm 17:6).

Tabitha's Journey West

Even before meeting Clayton, Tabitha and a friend had planned to move to San Diego in search of employment, but those plans fell through. After the wedding of her cousin Rich, Tabitha's desire to journey west for employment was rekindled. She had been seeking a teaching position since graduating from Geneva College, and California now suddenly became a real possibility.

The Lord Works Out the Details

As the Good Book says:

> Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me (Psalm 31:3).

So it was with Tabitha. After seeking employment for over a month while staying at her cousin's apartment in San Diego, the Lord moved. Tabitha was hired at the very school she had desired, and for the teaching position (second grade) she had hoped for. This could not have come at a better time. According to apartment policy,

she had stayed close to the end of her allotted time and would soon have to vacate the premises.

Where would she live now that she had her teaching position and needed to leave her cousin's apartment? She prayed about it. As she was waiting for God's answer to her prayers and contemplating her possibilities, an apartment opened up unexpectedly right below her cousin's apartment and next door to her future fiance, giving her the perfect living location. Clayton ended up becoming the husband Tabitha had prayed for so earnestly and waited for so patiently.

Tabitha Writes of Her Love for Clayton

As is my custom with any couple I marry, I asked both Tabitha and Clayton to write in a letter how they met and why they love each other. In answer to my question, "Why do you love Clayton and want to marry him?" Tabitha responded:

> I am going to start from a year and a half before I met him. I remember praying and writing a list of exactly what I wanted in a husband and thinking,"This list is too unrealistic. I will never find this perfect man." But I was still not going to settle for anything less. I just kept praying. I had decided to quit dating and just let God send him to me.
>
> I spent a year and a half praying and asked God for a couple of things:
>
> 1) To have us fall in love with each other's personalities, instead of the superficial way of the world, which focuses on outward appearances.
>
> 2) To know when I saw him this was the person I was going to marry. I also kept asking God to send me a man like the one in the list I had written.
>
> My list consisted of:
>
> *Appearance:* dark hair, blue or green eyes, tall—over 6 feet, good build, athletic, etc.
>
> *Personality:* the most important thing was he must be a

Christian, also able to make me laugh and feel good about myself, love being with others, want to do some type of missions work, and be romantic, and so the list went on and on.

Pretty unrealistic…huh? That's what I thought.

Everything changed on February 13th, a couple of days before my cousin's wedding. I had been hearing from my aunt about Rich's roommate, Clay, who was very good-looking, but not a committed Christian and was really picky and liked to go out and drink, etc. I kept thinking, "Why is everyone telling me about him? This is everything I am trying to stay away from."

I knew I was going to meet him at the wedding, so I was prepared to keep my walls up and let everyone know he was not for me. Well, from the moment I met him, he had my heart. He was nothing like what everyone had said he was!—except for one thing—he was extremely handsome! He had the most beautiful eyes and a smile that made me melt, but of course I would never let him know this.

For three days, we spent much time together. I loved that he loved being around my family. I loved how he was with other people, that he could take charge of a conversation and make people laugh. I loved that he always took time to talk to others. I loved that he was such an awesome conversationalist and an awesome listener, which is an uncommon trait in most men. We spent one night talking for about six hours straight with no one else around, and we never ran out of things to say to one another.

I had a chance to stay for another week and spend more time with Clay and get to know him more. But I prayed about it, and God told me to go home. So Clay and I decided we would see each other again in May.

Most people would think, "Yeah, right. You only spent three days together. You live clear across the country from one

another. You are not going to see each other for four months…it will never work."

The night we said good-bye we both had such peace we weren't afraid of what would happen or if we would actually see each other again. We both were filled with a peace that could only come from God, and we both knew this was going to work out. I came home and three days later, I knew this man was the one I was going to marry and spend the rest of my life with. So the phone calls began and the teary nights when I would miss him.

But prayer request number one was answered in that this was a long-distance relationship, and so much of our first couple of months together was spent over the phone talking. I began to realize God answered my prayer of falling in love with one another for our God-given personalities and not just basing it on outward appearance. Talking to one another by phone over the 2,000 miles that separated us caused us to focus on our personalities. As a result, I fell in love with him even more for the wonderful man he really is, and I began to see the real person God had created inside.

I also thought God had answered my second request by sending me my dream man I had written down in a list in my prayer journal. I just could not believe this person I dreamed about was actually a breathing and living being.

Well, let me tell you, dreams do come true. God is so good.

Tabitha, who believed this promise found in God's Word, saw it become a reality in her life:

> Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart (Psalm 37:4).

Clayton Comes to Pennsylvania

When Clayton first visited Tabitha in Pennsylvania in May 1997, I told him as the two of us lifted weights together in the fitness room at the ministry center that the three most important things in my life

are the Lord, family, and health. I added, "I am entrusting into your care one of the most precious things in the world to me, so do not do anything to violate that trust." He quickly responded, "I love your daughter and will never violate that trust."

Tabitha's faith challenged Clayton to a deeper walk with the Lord. In June he went into the mountains to seek Him with all his heart. It was then that he made a total commitment to Christ and to biblical Christianity.

Clayton Writes of His Love for Tabitha

The following is an e-mail message sent to me from Clayton regarding his love for Tabitha:

> Bill,
>
> You are asking me why I love your daughter. I can tell you I do love her with all I have…but why? Tabitha had an entire profile set up for the perfect man. I did not have any such tool. What I did use was my heart.
>
> When I met Tabitha, it was as if I had already known her. I felt comfortable with her. We spoke and we spent time together. I knew I could marry her. She was all I ever wanted without ever knowing what that was exactly.
>
> I have never met a woman who had such energy, who was so fun-loving, sincere and grounded in her ways. Her personality in conjunction with her incredible beauty became overpowering. I told Tabitha I was so focused on how comfortable I was around her and how easy it was to get to know her that there was a delay in noticing her eyes and her smile.
>
> Her cousin's wedding was an incredibly romantic time. When she left me to return to Pennsylvania, I had a strange feeling of knowing that I would see her again. I had so much confidence in her word and I believed that she felt the same way. I knew it would be difficult to see her again; she lived across the country. But I just knew it would work. I

never worried about it.

We saw each other again and again and we grew closer each time. The next thing I knew, after some time had passed, I confessed to her that I loved her. I was afraid it was too early to tell her because even if she felt the same way, I could end up scaring her away. It didn't. She sat down with me and confessed the same on an afternoon I will never forget.

As difficult as it is to define love, it is just as difficult to discover the reason for love or how it is created. I do know its origin—God. And I only know that just as God exists so does my love for Tabitha. So, I feel I cannot fully explain why I love Tabitha and at the same time do our love justice…words cannot explain what I feel or why I feel it.

But, let me tell you I believe our love for each other is a gift from God and a direct answer to prayer.

The Proposal

It was the Fourth of July. Clayton was on duty in San Diego and had stopped for his lunch break at the Soup Plantation restaurant where Tabitha, Karen, and other family members were waiting. When we had almost finished eating, Clayton stood up in the restaurant and asked for everyone's attention. Karen and I thought since Clay was a highway patrolman he was going to warn folks not to drink and drive on the Fourth, or some other public service announcement. Instead, Clay announced to an attentive audience that he loved Tabitha and was asking for her hand in marriage. After he got down on his knee and proposed to her, the people in the restaurant applauded.

God Is Faithful

Four months before the wedding Karen and I began praying and fasting. We needed the Lord's help and blessing. Many of the young adults in the wedding party were from parts of the country where snow was rare and Tabitha had always dreamed of a Christmas

wedding with all the accompanying decorations and snow-covered scenery. So Karen and I prayed specifically for snow to blanket the ground for our daughter's special day, yet the roads would be snow free; and for clear weather for those traveling to the ceremony.

Friday, the day Tabitha and Clayton arrived at Cleveland airport, we began to get some snow showers—enough for several members of the bridal party, who were from out West, to engage in nine or ten snowball fights on ministry property during that three-day period.

Sunday, December 7, 1997, as we were about to leave for the church at 2:30 p.m., the snow squalls that were predicted began to fall in earnest, so much so that one of the bridesmaids had to use an umbrella to cover the bride as she went from our van into the church. A short while later the snow had nearly stopped and the sky was clearing. By 3:00 p.m. the snow had stopped completely, the roads were snow free, and the sky had cleared. This enabled many of the folks who could not go out in slippery weather to attend the ceremony and travel afterwards to the reception several miles away. The large church sanctuary was packed for the ceremony and many commented that it was the most beautiful wedding they had ever attended.

On Monday, as family and friends and the bride and groom were going back to the airport at Cleveland, half the snow was already melting or gone and there was no new snow for several weeks. We are convinced that having snow on the ground, yet snow-free roads, was a wedding gift from the Lord and yet another confirmation.

During the wedding ceremony I spoke to our daughter:

> Tabitha, from the time you were in your mother's womb we prayed for you and dedicated you to the Lord. We raised you to fear and honor the Lord. You have been the best daughter any parents could ask. We prayed and fasted you would one day marry the mate of God's choice. We believe you are doing so. In love we commit you to the Lord and to Clayton to take care of you physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Was This All Merely Coincidence?

Tabitha lived in Hermitage, Pennsylvania and Clayton lived 2,000 miles away in San Diego, California. What were the chances of the two of them meeting? What were the chances of Tabitha finding a teaching job, seemingly out of nowhere, in a Christian school and in the grade she desired to teach? What were the odds for that "unexpected" vacancy in the apartment complex to open up? What were the odds that Tabitha would find a husband to match her list of criteria?

Was it mere coincidence snow was in place for the wedding, but with clear streets, when two weeks before and two weeks after there was no snow? Or is it that indeed there is an infinite, personal God, who cares about the details of our lives? Surely all of these events, having transpired in only a year's time, can only be attributed to the workings of a gracious God and heavenly Father who honors His covenant with His children who love and honor Him.

Their wedding was only the first of many more amazing events that have since occurred in the lives of Tabitha and Clayton and in the lives of their five children.

15

A Modern Day Love Story

You just read Tabitha and Clayton's storybook romance in the previous chapter. A couple of years later my son, BJ, and Tara got married. Now here is their modern day love story and another confirmation that sexuality when properly understood can be a very beautiful and romantic experience—the way God intended it to be.

Like his sister Tabitha, BJ was dedicated to the Lord while in his mother's womb. My wife and I prayed and fasted that both our daughter and our son would marry the person of God's choice and fulfill the calling and purpose the Lord had on their lives and families. So how did the Lord do it?

BJ was a senior in high school and Tara was a freshman when they met at a basketball game. After months of glances and flirting in the halls, BJ asked Tara out on a date. She knew her father would never allow her to date, so she and her mother "worked" on him. On February 17, 1994, BJ and Tara had their first date.

BJ's Story

BJ relates the following:

> The first time I saw Tara was at a Hickory High School basketball game. I remember thinking, "Wow, she is so pretty!" For the next year, I saw her at more basketball games, Buhl Park dances, and in the hallway at school. During this time, our relationship consisted merely of eye glancing and an occasional hello.
>
> Finally, I got tired of the casual flirting and I decided to ask her out on a date. I cannot lie, the main reason I asked her out was because she was so beautiful. However, after a few dates I realized that her beauty was not only external but

also internal.

I can visualize in my head the exact details of how I asked her out. She was walking to math class, so as I walked by her I romantically said, "Hey, you wanna go out some time?" She told me later she thought I was joking so she did not respond. Several days later, instead of just walking by, I stopped at her locker. This time she said "yes" and the following day, we had our first date.

There is no greater joy than when you finally find the person God wants you to marry. I remember the day I knew, without a doubt, God wanted me to marry Tara. We had been going through difficulties in our relationship. As a result, we decided to take a month away from each other, and after this time see if we wanted to get back together. While we were apart, I spent a lot of time in prayer trying to figure out what I should do. I knew that if we got back together it was with the intention to get married.

At the conclusion of the month, Tara and I decided to meet at Buhl Park and share what God had laid on our hearts in regard to our relationship. I was so nervous to see her. I had no idea what to say to her because I was still unsure of what God wanted.

Before we met, I asked God to somehow give me a sign as to whether or not she was the one that He wanted me to marry. Sure enough, God answered my prayer. There was a rainbow over Lake Julia. The moment I saw Tara's face I knew that I would marry her. As tears of joy rolled down my face, Tara and I agreed before the Lord that we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together. From that day on, I knew Tara was going to be my wife.

My roommate and I were talking about relationships and marriages. We were discussing various attributes and qualities that one should look for in a girl. After talking for a while, I said the following to him. "If the girl you are dating

brings you closer to Jesus Christ then you know you have a special person, but if she draws you away from Him, then you better run from her and not look back."

God has used Tara in my life to draw me closer to Him. All the degrees that I possess do not equal what I have learned from her. I thank God every day for her because she has a passion and love for the same One that I do—Jesus Christ.

It is an honor and a privilege when you get the chance to marry your best friend; when you get to spend the rest of your life with the person who knows your hidden dreams and passions; and when this person is the one who stands behind you and encourages you and sacrifices all they have to support you in what God has called you to do.

I thank God every day that I have Tara as my best friend. Everything that I have been able to accomplish in the past is only because she has been there cheering me on. She is my greatest fan and I am privileged to call her my wife.

I wrote the following to my father before he married us:

Why do I want to marry Tara? The main reason is not because she fills some void in my life, nor is it because life only has meaning with her as my wife. I want to marry Tara because I yearn every day to show her how much I love her. I want to wake up every morning and go to bed every night telling her the three most precious words I can say, "I love you." I look forward to seeing her smile; I love to watch her face glow with happiness. Tara is God's blessing to me. Just as He has loved me, He has given her to me to show the same selfless love: A love that is willing to sacrifice all to serve her. My promise to Tara before God is that in all my strength and in all my weakness I will love her for the rest of my life. As Jesus gave His life for the world, I give my life to her.

Tara's Story

Tara relates the following:

I remember meeting BJ at a basketball game. His friends were very nice. I would see BJ a lot, but we didn't talk much at first. I remember thinking he was cute, but he was always flirting with girls and I even saw him kiss a girl, so I never bothered with him.

When I was in third grade I remember admiring my grandma. I wanted to be more like her. What I admired was her love for God. I remember praying and asking Jesus to be with me and help me be a better person. Little did I know the little Catholic girl had just said her own sinner's prayer.

All through my years at CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine), I didn't learn much. But I remember the day we got to read from the Bible and how I loved it. My other grandma and great-grandma always had Bibles and I would read theirs but I didn't understand much.

The point of telling you this is to show you that I was searching. I just wasn't sure what for.

I remember in eighth grade saying a prayer. I asked God to show me the person I would marry.

I did not want to date a million guys. I wanted to be like my parents and find that one person I was supposed to be with forever.

I actually forgot about that prayer for a while. Then at the Buhl Park dance BJ came over and put his arm around me. I melted inside, but he asked me to dance with his friend. I was disappointed. Then I saw BJ with some girl and I was totally upset. I thought he was such a jerk the way he acted with all the girls. I was determined to keep my distance from this guy.

In the fall of 1993, I saw this blonde guy giving a speech for

the soccer team at "Meet the Team" night. My friend said, look how gorgeous he is. I melted inside again. Wow! He was hot! I said, "Who is he?" And she said, "You know who…BJ Rudge!"

The school year went on. I would see him at school and he would still be flirting with girls. I would smile and walk away. I never approached him. I think this is what made him curious about me. I was the one girl that didn't throw herself at him. Part of it was because I figured he wouldn't want me, part of it was because I thought he was a jerk for being such a flirt, and part was because I wasn't allowed to date yet.

Somehow, I was in the only freshman homeroom in the senior hallway right beside BJ's room. Gradually our chats became more frequent. I can admit first liking him at the Christmas chorus concert. He fixed his hair different and he looked like such a nerd! But for some reason I was starting to have a crush by laughing at him. I remember telling my mom that I liked him and she encouraged it because his dad was a minister. "He must be a nice kid," she said.

Anyway, we soon were flirting at school events and in the halls between classes. I knew he liked me, but I wasn't allowed to date so I figured there was no point. I think this helped me not to be an easy catch.

He asked me out once and I just stood there. I didn't answer because I thought he was either kidding or trying to make fun of me. Besides, I wasn't allowed to date. What is a girl to do? Nothing. Almost ten days went by and I was getting books out of my locker when these soccer shoes stepped beside me. I looked up and it was him. After I slowed my heart down, I tried to control my blushing and my throat jumping out of me. I stood up and smiled. He asked me out and I said "yes" this time.

After my mom and I worked on my dad to let me go out, we

went to see the movie "My Girl Two" and to eat TCBY yogurt.

We had decided not to get serious because he would be leaving for college and I was so young, but as you know that didn't work. I remember BJ saying to me, "I 'loke' you," but he was scared to admit he was falling in love. "I'm growing fond of you," he said. The first time he said, "I love you" was when I stayed home from a basketball game with him because he was sick. And he wrote it in my hand with his finger. "I love U!"

BJ went to Geneva College and came home on weekends. I remember getting in a fight before he left and he told me I was the first girl he thought he could marry. At this point, I knew that I loved him too!

Of course, you know we had many issues to work out with religion and Christianity. It wasn't easy because I always did have a personal relationship with Jesus and was Catholic. What I didn't have was a commitment.

Soon, my relationship with God bloomed and so did our relationship. We had many hard times and fights. Just when we came to the breaking point and thought we could never make it through anymore, we prayed and prayed. I remember asking God for a sign to show me what was right. We went for a walk in the park and saw a rainbow. And BJ said, "Do you think it's a sign?" I knew it was.

We had a long haul ahead of us. I wasn't even sure that I wanted to be with him or could forgive him for everything. It was hard.

Then one day he took me out for ice cream and bought me a rose. He read a letter to me telling me how much he loved me and how sorry he was. He started to cry. I asked him why and he said because, "I just realized I am sitting across from the person I am going to spend the rest of my life with." It was at that moment I knew he was the one for me.

I want to marry BJ because I love him. After all the breakups and fights, we could never stay apart from each other. No one can make me madder or happier than BJ. No matter how hurt or upset I am, when he hugs me, I am okay and I feel safe and I feel peace.

I love the fact he reminds me of my dad in so many ways that others can't even see. I love the fact he shows me how to love. He showed me the love of Jesus Christ. And he makes me a better person. I love the fact no matter how mad I am, when he smiles, even my stubborn self has to give in. I love the way he listens to me whine and complain. He waits till I stress out completely and then tells me to calm down.

I love the fact we don't let each other give up. We both give "tough love" when we need it. When I am weak, he is strong and when he is weak, I am strong. We complete each other. He says he wants to have more "childlike faith" and I want to have more biblical knowledge. I love the fact I know he is always there for me no matter what time of day —even 2,000 miles apart.

I want to marry him because he is my best friend. I hate saying good-bye at night. I want to wake up and know that he is beside me. I am anxious to see what God has for our lives together. Where we will go? What we will do? How many kids we will have and what they will look like?

All I know is that I love BJ and I want to spend the rest of my life with him and trust God together to meet our needs.

The Proposal

BJ's comments about the proposal:

It was five years after our first date that I proposed to Tara. We had been discussing marriage a month prior and had looked at different engagement rings. Finally, I found just the right one I wanted to give Tara.

I began to plan this romantic day for us. However, these plans quickly changed. The day I got the ring, I had to give it to her. I was leaving in a month for California to get my master's degree. I had plans of proposing in a hot air balloon or over a loud speaker on the plane on my way to California, but when I got the ring, I couldn't wait.

It was November 18, 1998. I do not know exactly why, but I just had to give her the ring. In the small amount of time I had, I planned how I would propose. At that time, Tara was a hostess at Hickory Grille. I called her manager on the phone and told her that I was planning on coming in after Tara got off work and propose to her.

As Tara's shift came to an end I showed up and told her I wanted to get dessert. Having a taste for sweets Tara had no objection. After eating our dessert, I arranged for one of my friends to bring in a box of roses. He brought them in to the delight of Tara. She had no idea that there was an engagement ring inside.

As her eyes got big and tears rolled down her face, I got the attention of the entire restaurant. Getting down on one knee I said to her, "I want to spend the rest of my life with you, will you marry me?" She responded by saying, "Yes."

After being engaged only one month, I left for California. This separation lasted a year and a half, and believe me it was not easy. I missed seeing Tara's smiling face. But I am thankful that I was at least able to hear her voice over the phone. This time away proved to be a challenge for our relationship, but through it, God brought us even closer.

God Fulfills His Plan

BJ and Tara were apart six years while BJ went to college and then for his master's degree and Tara went to nursing school. During their two-year engagement they only saw each other every couple of months. They knew how hard it was to maintain purity while dating

for so many years, but this strengthened their commitment to their relationship while dating and later helped build trust in their marriage. They knew they could trust each other to not ever cheat.

BJ and Tara are now married and they both will tell you that it was worth the wait to remain virgins until marriage. BJ completed his doctorate after marrying Tara and is now serving in full-time ministry, as well as coaching soccer, teaching at a university and helping Tara raise their six children.

16

Closing Comments

"Storybook romances" and "modern-day love stories" can happen if we are willing to trust and obey God as we await His timing for us. Praying for the right mate and remaining pure will definitely, eventually prove to be an asset. However, not all people are expected to marry and God will bless singles as well as married couples. It does not matter what your circumstances or life situation might be, God has a plan and a purpose for you. It does not matter whether you are married to the love of your life, or feel trapped in a marriage or in an unmarried state that you feel powerless to change.

When we choose to surrender our lives to Jesus, He takes whatever we have, including our circumstances, and begins to work them together for good and to accomplish His purpose. Your circumstances may not necessarily change as past choices sometimes last a lifetime—but God will change you. He will give you the wisdom and fortitude necessary to change what you can and to be content in what you cannot change.

Pathway to Victory!

Why live a life of continual defeat, frustration and guilt when you can live an abundant and victorious life through Christ? God's path may not always be easy, but it is the most rewarding—both in this life and the one to come. While overcoming sexual immorality can seem daunting, God will give you the strength to tear down the strongholds and to be all that He intended you to be—even in our sex-crazed culture.

Open your heart to receive that which far surpasses any physical pleasure: a life of purity, peace, and power is worth every effort to obtain it. Sincerely repent and receive God's forgiveness. Attitudes

and actions will change as your mind is renewed by God's Word (Romans 12:2). The fruit of the spirit—one of which is self-control (Galatians 5:23)—will develop as the power of God's Spirit works in and through you.

May your life be transformed to live victoriously—the victor in a great contest!

For More Information

Bill Rudge has produced numerous books, pamphlets and audio messages on a variety of timely topics. For a complete listing or a copy of his informative newsletter, visit www.billrudge.org or write to:

Bill Rudge Ministries
P.O. Box 108
Sharon, PA 16146 U.S.A.
www.billrudge.org